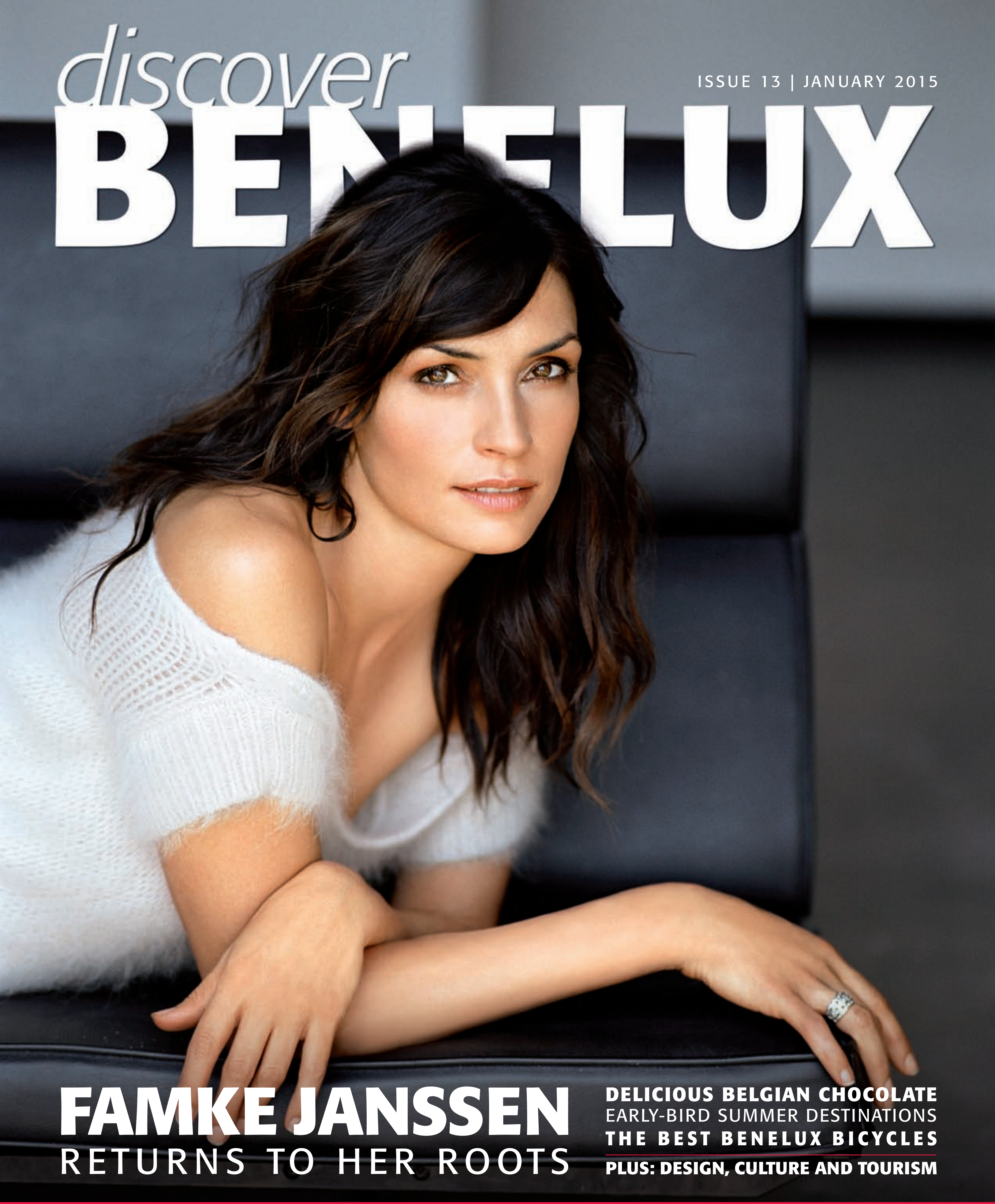

discover BENELUX

ISSUE 13 | JANUARY 2015

FAMKE JANSSEN
RETURNS TO HER ROOTS

DELICIOUS BELGIAN CHOCOLATE
EARLY-BIRD SUMMER DESTINATIONS
THE BEST BENELUX BICYCLES
PLUS: DESIGN, CULTURE AND TOURISM

PROMOTING BELGIUM, THE NETHERLANDS AND LUXEMBOURG

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Promoting Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg

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Dear Reader,

January is a time of looking forward, so here I would like to give a peek at wonderful things to come in *Discover Benelux* this year. This winter, we will delve into the Walloon town of Mons, crowned European Capital of Culture 2015. Once a quiet place nearby the Belgian border with France, it has transformed into a bustling city hosting 300 events and opening several new museums this year, set to attract visitors from all over the world.

Moving on to spring, we will offer you a colourful glimpse into the world of Dutch tulips that has a much more moving history than one might expect from such a humble flower.

This summer the event no one can circumnavigate is the Tour de France, with its Grand Départ in Utrecht. Moving south through the Dutch province of Zeeland and the Belgian cities of Antwerp, Seraing and Huy, the cyclists will see some of the Benelux's best sights.

Not long after that, our magazine will be dedicated to Vincent van Gogh, celebrating the life of this magnificent painter who died exactly 125 years ago this July. With big exhibitions all over the region, even the Keukenhof will arrange their tulips in an ode to Van Gogh.

Next, we will look at the rich life of a little character who is turning 60 this year, Miffy. The Dutch children's favourite bunny will celebrate her birthday in style with a new, dedicated exhibition and a completely refurbished Dick Bruna House opening at the end of the year.

Then finally, let's return to our current issue, starring the fabulous Famke Janssen (see page 20). I could not have hoped for a better star to open 2015. With her impressive career spanning three decades in America, there is little sign of her slowing down. This year she will even act for the first time in a Dutch movie.

I guess even after years in Hollywood, the Benelux still holds enough interesting tales that are worth returning for. Let's hope 2015 will be the start of another captivating story for all of us.

Myriam Gwynned Dijck,
Editor

SOME INNOVATIONS TRULY CREATE PROFOUND CHANGES

Some innovations create profound change and this precious, exceptional, professional skincare line is one of them. Unique, potent, paraben free, fortified formulations containing Dead Sea actives, phospholipids and stem cells which capture the earth's rejuvenating secrets.Driven by the everlasting quest for the most advanced and powerful natural age defying ingredients, Premiers research team scours the earth searching for new innovations.

EINIGE INNOVATIONEN ERZEUGEN WIRKLICH GRUNDLEGENDE VERÄNDERUNGEN

Einige Innovationen erzeugen grundlegende Veränderungen und diese wertvolle, außergewöhnliche und professionelle Hautpflegelinie ist eine davon. Diese einzigartige, starke, parabenfreie, reichhaltige Formel enthält aktive Stammzellen aus dem Toten Meer, die das Verjüngungsgeheimnis der Erde beinhalten. Angetrieben von der immer währenden Suche nach den fortgeschrittenen, kräftigsten natürlichen altersbekämpfenden Inhaltsstoffen, hat das Forschungsteam von Premier die Erde nach neuen Innovationen abgesucht.

QUELQUES INNOVATIONS PROVOQUENT RÉELLEMENT DES CHANGEMENTS PROFONDS

Quelques innovations provoquent réellement des changements profonds et cette ligne de soins de peau précieuse, exceptionnelle et professionnelle en est une. Cette formule unique, forte, enrichie, sans paraben, qui contient des cellules souches de la mer Morte, qui comportent le secret rajeunissant de la terre. Poussé par la recherche perpétuelle des contenus plus avancés, plus forts, naturels qui combattent l'âge, le département de la recherche de Premier a ratissé la terre à la recherche d'innovations.

Switzerland: Manor Geneva, Manor Lausanne, Manor Vevey, Manor Morges, Globus Geneva, Loeb Bern, Loeb Thun, Manor Schaffhausen, Manor Basel, Globus Zürich, Globus Bern, Manor Ascona, Manor Balerna, Manor Bellinzona, Manor Biasca, Manor Locarno, Manor Lugano, Manor S. Antonino, Manor Vezia.
Belgium: Premier Bruxelles, 14 Galleri Porte Louise 1050 Bruxelles
Premier Bruxelles, 44 Galleri Porte Louise 1050 Bruxelles

www.premier-deadsea.com

FASHION PICKS

Office chic

January is all about the start of the New Year, new beginnings, and of course, new clothes. With all the festivities behind us, it's time to discover some new ways to wear that business suit or maybe even give your old plain shirts a new look just by dressing them up or down, with very little effort. Here are our top fashion finds that will guarantee you start your New Year fully in style.

TEXT: ARIANE GLOVER | PRESS PHOTOS

1

WOMEN

1: Rediscover the suit

Suits have traditionally been seen as an outfit designed for men; however, SuperTrash has spurned that thought and adapted it to a women's style and body shape. The best thing about this look is that you can wear it on a fun night out, as well as to a classy dinner or business meeting.

Brady blouse €100

Jasino jacket €180

Paradox pants €150

Pekaboo pumps €160

Available at www.supertrash.com

2: The perfect tote

Start your first day back at the office in the most stylish way possible with this beautiful burgundy coloured tote from Belgian-born fashion designer and former royalty Diane von Fürstenberg.

€423

Available at www.dvf.com

3

3: The golden accessory

Looking for a new item to decorate your neck and give your outfit a classy touch? Then this thin necklace from Dutchbasics is exactly what you need.

€125

Available at www.dutchbasics.nl

4

4: Globetrotting leather

This luxurious leather trolley, in a robust cognac colour is ideal for traveling to international business meetings. Made by PHILOMIJN, it is flexible and easy to use, with a sturdy handle and solid wheels.

€679

Available at www.philomijn.com

5

MEN

5: Indigo shirt

This timeless Oxford will be one of your best investments this year, as it will never go out of fashion. G-sus designed a very stylish shirt, indigo coloured, with little white buttons and a small front-left breast pocket. This sure is a real must-have.

€80

Available at www.g-sus.com

6

6: The wrist accessory

With this beautiful watch from one of the most exclusive Luxemburgish jewellers, Schroeder, you will never be late again to that important meeting. This watch is a real eye-catcher and a great way to step away from the norm.

(Price on request)

Available at www.schroeder-joailliers.lu

7

7: Sporty suit jacket

Men in suits, working hard, looking serious… Why not go for a sportier look this year, while still including that classy shirt and blazer? Well, Cold Method did it for you with their new suit collection. It's stylish, has a luxurious look and at an affordable price.

Darwin jacket €250

Steph shirt €100

Karter knit €100

Available at www.coldmethod.com

DESIRABLE DESIGNS

Start the year in style

Like so many of us, have you decided to work out more this year? Try competitive cycling with this top bike, and you will race like a pro in no time. Then for the house, here are some beautiful designs that will bring warmth and originality into your home, perfect for a stylish start to 2015.

TEXT: MYRIAM GWYNNED DIJCK | PRESS PHOTOS

1: Sun year round

This enchanting photograph by Gaby Fling entitled 'Monte Carlo' captures that summer feeling we all long for in the cold days of January. With Mediterranean palm trees delicately reflected in the sunglasses, this print will give your home a warm, sunny feeling whatever the season. The image, taken in 2014, is now available in a limited edition of eight issues, each numbered and signed by the talented photographer. Available in two sizes;

96x144cm (€4,500)

133x200cm (€5,500).

gabysfling.com

4: Stay warm with your feet up

This furry chair by Luxembourg designer Christophe de la Fontaine is ideal to keep you warm and comfortable throughout the winter. The 'El Santo' is made from a flat piece of sturdy sheepskin leather fixed to a metal base. The unusual shape of this spacious chair makes it look as if the seat is suspended in the air. Available with optional footrest.

€2,270

www.dante.lu

2: Sleek yet solid as stone

Judith Wiersema is known for her sleek sculptures that seek to address women's issues while portraying a pleasing surface. This might seem ironic but this contradiction attracts viewers and gives them a subtle message. The sculpture 'Push Up' displays a beautiful body captured in a bra that is almost too tight. It's up to the viewer to give this meaning and let their fantasy flow. Wiersema works in stone, clay or wood and then transforms it into aluminium or bronze achieving a contemporary look.

€16,500

www.judithwiersema.com

3: The ultimate road race bike

Want to take up competitive cycling this year? The wind tunnel tested Reacto is the summit of road bikes, being the fastest, most comfortable aero model. The frame weighs 1,000 grams, has a NACA-fastback tube profile and direct mount brakes for optimal aerodynamic performance. The top model is the Team-E with Shimano Dura-Ace Di2 brakes and digital shifting and a Rotor Flow Aero crankset. It's the bike of choice for the WorldTour Team Lampre-Merida.

€7,500

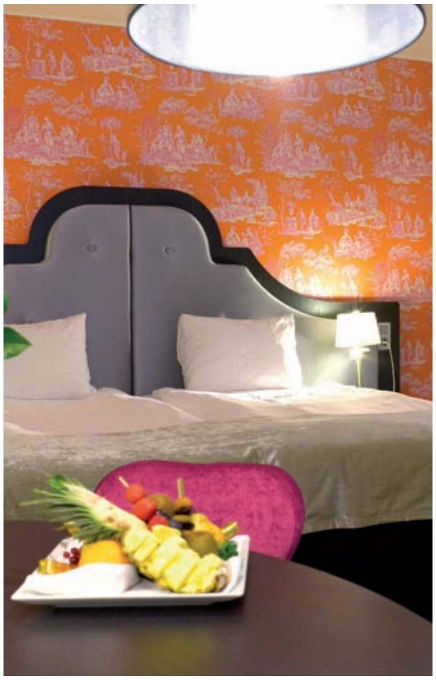
www.merida.nl

5: Bright from every direction

These funky little sphere wall lights can rotate in all directions. Via a built-in magnet, this is the first and only lamp that achieves full 360° rotation so you can light every corner in a room. The '12-25' by Christian Van Suetendael, who is part of Belgium-based studio Co Twee, is standard available in black, white and chrome. Other colours, like this lively shade of blue can be supplied upon request.

€200

dark.be



HOTEL OF THE MONTH, BELGIUM

Home has a new address

TEXT: HARUN OSMANOVIC | PHOTOS: HOTEL BRISTOL

Bearing the name of the Norwegian creator of an international hotel group, Olav Thon, the THON Hotel Bristol Stephanie in Brussels offers rooms to fit the needs and the budget of every customer, from the businessman to the couple on a leisure holiday. The hotel in Brussels is one of the group's top-end locations in Belgium.

Its interior is of the most exquisite taste, a fine mix between classicism and elegant vanguard aspirations with a colourful splash. It will satisfy the demands of the purists as well as those with the most modern of tastes. Located on Avenue Louise – a ten minute walk from the Grand Place and very close to the European district – the THON Hotel Bristol Stephanie welcomes you for business or leisure on Avenue Louise 91-93, 1050 Brussels.

"What we strive to do, is offer our clients an at home experience in all circumstances," says Alain Vanbinst, general manager of the THON Hotel Bristol Stephanie. That indeed is one reason why this establishment offers some of the largest rooms in the city – from 35 to 45 square metres. Two suites on the top floor of the building are more akin to a studio than your standard hotel room.

What's more, the at home experience approach goes way beyond… If you are in town regularly, you might want to leave your suits on site: Vanbinst's team will dry-clean them and have them ready for your next visit, returning them as they were left in your room. Or the team might even surprise you with a peignoir, a luxurious dressing gown, with your initials on it.

With the same state of mind, on the ground floor, the Thon Hotel Bristol Stephanie invites everyone to the restaurant Ninety One which opened a few weeks ago. The splendid furniture in turquois, olive green, mustard yellow and bright colours reflects the energy and freshness of the food served by the executive chef Sébastien Lemmens. The menu is recomposed every ninety one days, and the current highlights are the king crab ravioli in a Bourbon vanilla sauce along with chards sautéed in curcuma, wok cooked cod or a simple yet exquisitely original Ninety One burger. "We want our guests to discover new tastes and have fun with them," concludes Vanbinst.

Now you know where to go to on your next trip to Brussels, the only caveat is that one visit at the Thon Hotel Bristol Stephanie might make home feel a lot less like home… you've been warned.

www.thonhotels.be/bristolstephanie

PIERRE MARCOLINI
HAUTE CHOCOLATERIE
NEUHAUS INVENTED THE BELGIAN PRALINE IN 1912

SALON DU CHOCOLAT

SPECIAL THEME

The Delicious World of Belgian Chocolate

After last year's successful launch, Brussels is welcoming the second edition of the Salon du Chocolat. Taking place at Brussels Expo in February 2015, the Salon du Chocolat will host incredible chocolate companies, demonstrations, tastings, pastry workshops, couture outfits made entirely of chocolate and much more.

TEXT & PHOTOS: SALON DU CHOCOLAT

This second edition is set to be an even more mouth-watering and delicious event for all chocolate lovers. From 6 to 8 February, the Salon du Chocolat will celebrate Belgian chocolate and will highlight the roots of its unique savoir-faire.

During three days, the Palais 1 of the Brussels Expo will be entirely dedicated to all things chocolate with 150 participants all under one roof. Chocolatiers, pastry makers, chefs and cocoa experts will display their talent over 6,000 square metres of exhibition space, and share their passion with the public.

This year's programme will feature even more festive and educational activities that will help visitors to better know the universe of chocolate and cocoa.

Visitors can expect continuing shows accessible to all including:

- The greatest chocolatiers and pastry chefs will share their passion for chocolate and unveil their new products.
- The Chocolate Fashion Show with couture outfits out of chocolate created by the finest fashion designers and the most talented chocolatiers.
- Live demonstrations and culinary lessons run by prestigious chefs and chocolatiers.
- Pastry workshops dedicated to the transmission of know-how.
- Educational workshops for younger visitors designed to introduce them to the magic of chocolate.
- A programme of talks & tastings on major topical issues to do with cocoa and chocolate.
- The presentation of masterful creations and sculptures.
- A chocolate bookshop unveiling the latest culinary books with book signings.
- The great museums of chocolate featuring cultural exhibits.

Brussels Salon du Chocolat
6-8 February
Venue
Brussels Expo
Tickets (in advance)
brussels.salon-du-chocolat.com

Galerie de la Reine, Neuhaus's original store

BELGIAN PRALINES

A sweet but not so short history

The tradition of chocolate and praline making in Belgium is a longstanding one, for which the Belgians are known around the world. A lesser-known fact is where and when pralines were invented and by whom. To answer these questions we first have to make a distinction: between the origin of the candy and the origin of the word.

TEXT: SILVIA DE VRIES | PHOTOS: NEUHAUS WWW.NEUHAUS.BE

We've come to know chocolates with a soft or liquid filling as Belgian pralines. The origin of this type of candy dates back as far as 1857 when Brussels pharmacist Jean Neuhaus used chocolate to cover medicine and its bad taste. Fifty-five years later, in 1912, Neuhaus Jr. replaced the medicine with a more tasty filling and called the sweet a 'praline'.

At the time, the word 'praline' had actually been used for centuries already, to address another type of candy, namely sugar-coated almonds. Clement Lassagne, chef to the French Duke of Praslin, César Gabriel de Choiseul, decided to dip almonds in boiling sugar in 1636. When asked what this tasty sweet was called, he named it after his master: Praslin. Later on these sugared almonds became known as 'pralines'.

Back to Neuhaus Jr., who was a very clever man, with an equally clever wife. The first pralines were sold in a typical Belgian cone shaped bag, mainly used for fries. Obviously these were not fit to keep the delicate pralines safe and so Neuhaus Jr.'s wife designed a gift box, or 'ballotin', in which the pralines could be stored uniformly, safely and of course beautifully wrapped. The rest as they say, is history.

A culture of chocolate

These days chocolate and chocolate making is part of the Belgium heritage. Unsurprisingly, on average Belgians eat 6 kilos of chocolate per person each year (according to the Royal Belgian Association of the Biscuit, Chocolate, Praline and Confectionary).

Over the years pralines became a token of love, not very surprising as each piece is made by hand, or at least the true Belgian

BELOW: Galerie de la Reine, where the Neuhaus pharmacy was located in 1900

pralines are, with much thought and love for the crafts. The real deal is often free of additives as well, which means you've got to eat the pralines quite quickly. But that doesn't seem to be a problem for most people.

Praline and praliné

Perhaps you never realised it, but there is a distinct difference between praline and praliné. One being a piece of chocolate filled with a soft or liquid filling, the other being a certain type of filling. Praliné, a type of creamy filling, is made from crushed almonds, hazelnuts or other nuts combined with boiled sugar, vanilla and cocoa (and sometimes cocoa butter), reminiscent of the original praline invented by Clement Lassagne in 1636.

Praliné can also be a stand-alone candy: covered by only the wrapping and not, as is the case with pralines, covered by a layer of chocolate. Due to its popularity, a praliné paste can be bought in jars and used – for example – as a spread on sandwiches and cakes.

Delicate chocolate, delicate flavour

The flavour and texture combination for which pralines are known, and which helped them gain their fame, is unique on its own. It took other Belgian chocolatiers years before they were able to create a praline as delicate as the ones made by Neuhaus Jr.

Now, over 100 years later, the praline has become not only an export product, but Belgian's pride as well.

Pralines? Bon bon!

Bon is French for 'good'. A reduplication of the word by French children created a nickname, if you will, for the filled chocolates that are also known as pralines. In the Dutch language, the name 'bon bon' was also adopted. Currently, this is widely used for chocolate sweets and 'praline' is usually used to describe the filling.

Artisanal pralines

While Belgian chocolate is very popular, not all chocolatiers use the nation's own produce to create pralines. As a matter of fact, Geert Vercruysse of Patisserie-Chocolaterie Vercruysse in Kortrijk, doesn't use Belgian chocolate at all. "I work exclusively with artisanal chocolate makers and the only chocolate from Europe I use, is Swiss chocolate. Personally I think the Swiss still make the most delicious milk chocolate," says Vercruysse.

By using chocolate from artisanal brands such as Marou (Vietnam), Pacari (Ecuador) and the Grenada Chocolate Company (Caribbean), Vercruysse believes he has a head start when it comes to making pralines. "Because I use the best chocolate from around the world I have the best possible base from which I can create my pralines," he says. "I don't think there is a secret to Belgian pralines; we have a long-standing tradition when it comes to praline making and chocolate, but in the end it's the ingredients you use that matter."

ETHIQUABLE

A fair trade and fair taste

Founded as a cooperative enterprise in 2009, Ethiquable is a specialist in fair trade and organic products, bringing to the Benelux the best and tastiest products from countries south of the equator in a fair and environmentally-friendly way.

TEXT: BETTINA GUIRKINGER | PHOTOS: ETHIQUABLE

With the ambition to sustain small-scale farming, over the years Ethiquable has successfully built a strong relationship with small farming cooperatives all over the southern world to bring products of high quality and taste to consumers in Europe. This ensures that everyday products such as coffee, tea, cereals and chocolate come from their country of origin certified 100% organic, and contribute to a diet free of chemicals and GMOs.

"The average consumer is more and more concerned with where their food comes from and who is responsible for making it," says co-founder Stephan Vincent, "and this is an answer that we can provide them." Operating in over 20 countries and still growing, Ethiquable values excellence in their products and pays close attention to the economic, biodiversity and social impact of their work, putting the worker at the centre of its scheme. "We strongly believe that small-scale farming is a key component in sustainable development. Not only does it ensure products of high quality, it also allows farmers all over the world to be able to live from their land and get a fair price for their hard work."

Invited by the Salon du Chocolat this year, Ethiquable was asked to present their products next to the finest chocolatiers from Belgium, Switzerland and France, where it had already won the prize for Cacao Excellence last year. Beyond their ethical values, Ethiquable stood out by the richness of its cocoa beans in the creation of their chocolate. While different types of beans are often mixed together in the production of chocolate, Ethiquable keeps beans from the same origin together, which gives their chocolate a unique and powerful taste.

"We really believe that it is possible to create a high quality product with high quality ingredients and still be able to meet social, economical and environmental responsibility. One doesn't have to go without the other," concludes Vincent. The future looks bright and promising for Ethiquable, which is still growing and looking to enlarge the scope of their work.

www.ethiquable.be

Co-founder Stephan Vincent

Every bite is joy

TEXT: HARUN OSMANOVIC | PHOTOS: CORNÉ DYNASTIE

There is chocolate, and there is Belgian chocolate… and then there is a third kind, a kind of its own, an endangered species of traditionally homemade Belgian chocolate that triggers all sorts of pavlovian reflexes like nothing else does: salivation, various pupillary responses and ultimately mass releases of endorphin. Corné Dynastie is of the latter ilk.

Jean Corné, the owner, is the last heir of the prestigious Corné house of praline established in Belgium for four generations. Unlike most chocolate houses which have grown to become factories, Jean has established his workshop in the old family house where he works with his son Antoine and two employees who have been with Corné Dynastie for over 20 years.

"We really take pride in our products, and this is why each one of our pralines is almost entirely handmade," explains Jean Corné. Each day, upon arrival at the workshop, Jean and Antoine get an order from their store located in the Woluwe shopping centre in Brussels and start crafting the delicacies, manually sealing hundreds each day.

"Most of our pralines, like the Manons which are a speciality of ours, cannot be produced mechanically," says Antoine Corné. "This is probably why we are among the last ones doing them the traditional way."

Every day, it is no more than four people – eight hands that is – who cut and carve, fill and stuff, then coat or seal and place every bite of joy in boxes that are shipped to the three stores of the brand. All the hard work of eight hands for tons of chocolate pralines and a proportional amount of joy.

www.cornedynastie.com

History to get your teeth into

TEXT: MARTIN PILKINGTON | PHOTOS: ANTOINE BRYNAERT (COURTESY OF CHOCO-STORY)

If there's one cultural attraction in Brussels sure to please the kids it's Choco-Story Brussels, the chocolate museum. Not that many adults would object to a visit either – naturally with some tasting.

Belgium is celebrated worldwide for its chocolates, and anyone visiting its capital who's keen to understand why should head to the rue de la Tête d'Or. In a 17th century former brewery near the Grand Place three floors of exhibits and regular live demonstrations explain the history of the product, its manufacture process, and what makes Belgian artisan chocolate special.

The owners clearly know their subject: "My mother established the museum in 1998, and she was the daughter of one of the Godiva brand's founders and also created her own marque," says Peggy van Lierde, its director since 2007.

Chocolate is a passion the family wants to communicate to the wider world: Choco-Story Brussels is behind the creation of the Route Belge de Chocolat, and will be a prominent exhibitor at the Salon du Chocolat in its home city in February (see page 10). That passion has brought success, so much so that in 2016 it is moving to far larger premises close by.

Exhibits like the beautiful antique chocolate pots and displays that illustrate how cocoa is grown and processed appeal to the mind; but the main event grabs the nose and taste buds: "The culmination of the visit is a demonstration of chocolate making," says Peggy: "And of course at the end you get to taste the famous Belgian praline!"

www.mucc.be

Founder and director Anne-Marie Martiny (standing in the centre wearing red and black) with her Langues sur Mesure colleagues.

A bespoke language school that makes learning enjoyable and easy

Travelling abroad on business, moving to another country and becoming an expat, trying to learn the language of an important new business partner… all these situations come with many challenges related to language skills. Langues sur Mesure is one of the fastest growing language schools in Luxembourg with a method focusing on the level and learning style of the students.

TEXT: HARUN OSMANOVIC | PHOTOS: LANGUES SUR MESURE

Anne-Marie Martiny who founded the school over ten years ago, comes from a more medical background with training in speech-language pathology, the methods of which she has adapted to the learning of a foreign tongue. Today the school offers classes in French, German, Luxembourguish, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Chinese and many others.

"During our classes," says Martiny, "we have noticed that many expats had problems adapting to the local culture; this is why an important part of our teaching focuses on the specific cultural aspects of living in that country."

One of the reasons why Martiny's school has been successful and grown over the past ten years is that she made sure that the students of Langues sur Mesure are not just numbers in a system. They are tested, evaluated and their particular cases are taken into consideration when the programme is created, and this is something all the companies want to hear.

Recently, realising that people learn faster when they like a class, its subject and atmosphere, Martiny has built programmes of the most cordial kind. "We have organised themed conversation classes, usually occurring over lunch for ninety minutes, allowing students to speak freely and practise while having fun."

The school Langues sur Mesure also offers immersion days during which Martiny takes students on a field trip, to France or to Germany where education and fun coexist.

"We have had the chance of visiting Nancy with students and they loved it because visiting museums and learning about the arts and history of a region gives another dimension to the language; ultimately learning becomes easier and faster," she concludes.

No matter what your level is, and what your goals are, Langues sur Mesure has many colours on its palette and just as many approaches for its students.

www.langues-sur-mesure.com

SEB

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Discover the flavoursome world of cheese

It all started when Henri Willig inherited his family's dairy farm. A farmer's life wasn't quite enough for him, so he decided to do a course in cheese making. Together with his wife, Riet, he built a cheese dairy next to the farm and in 1974 they opened their own little cheese shop, selling a new brand of cheese labelled 'Henri Willig'.

TEXT: MYRIAM GWYNNED DIJCK | PHOTOS: HENRI WILLIG

Now Henri Willig's tasty cheeses are more popular than ever – they are currently sold in twenty shops in and around Amsterdam, including a chain of trendy outlets called Cheese & More by Henri Willig, and they also supply to wholesale customers. "Even though we've grown a lot throughout the years, we still stay true to our philosophy of being a personal and honest brand. We keep our production cycle short; our cheeses go straight from the countryside to the client," says son Wiebe Willig, the general manager.

Last year, the company celebrated its 40th birthday and currently employs 350 staff. With Wiebe as the second generation taking over the business, the Henri Willig is still very much family-owned. "We make everything ourselves in our two cheese dairies. We own every milk truck that collects the milk, so we can ensure the quality of our cheeses," Wiebe says. "We go right against today's trend of companies getting bigger and less personal and we see that this is something that appeals to people."

Miniature cheese, maximal flavour

Known for their 'Polderkaas', 'Hooidammer' and characteristic miniature cheeses, Henri Willig is not a company to sit still. At the moment, 30 different types and flavours are sold either made from goat's, cow's or sheep's milk, and the selection is updated every year. "Some of our new flavours include coconut cheese, a goat's cheese with lavender, and champagne flavoured cheese," says Wiebe. Many of these varieties are exclusively available at their Henri Willig shops. The two most popular ones are the tried and tested Gouda cheese and the more adventurous truffle cheese.

In fact, Wiebe and his team of cheese experts come together every month to develop new, unique flavours. "Every year we create at least six new flavours. Some of these will replace other cheeses, others

will stay in our range for years to come if they prove popular," Wiebe explains. When asked about his personal favourite, Wiebe doesn't have to think twice: "That is easy, our mature goat's cheese. We've won many prizes with this."

Cheese and much more

While cheese has been one of the Netherlands' biggest export products for years, in the centre of Amsterdam was not a single shop selling cheese until recently. In 1995 this all changes when Henri Willig opened their first small-scale shop. This later developed into a separate chain of trendy, high-end cheese boutiques Cheese & More by Henri Willig. "Every flavour of Henri Willig cheese is available here, as well as all types of cheese utensils and related products such as wine, savoury snacks and mustard, but also Dutch speciality products such as liquorice, nougat and syrup waffles," says Wiebe.

The practical size of their miniature cheeses are especially popular among tourists as a souvenir or gift. To be sure you buy a flavour you like, at Cheese & More by Henri Willig every single cheese can be tasted first. Wiebe explains, "If there isn't already a sample ready in the shop, the members of staff are always happy to give you a taster of your cheese of choice."

The full experience

If the sight of cheese leaves you wanting to know more, then you can join a daily workshop at the Proefzolder for an informative tasting session. Held every day in the afternoon for groups between two and 30 people, you are invited to taste several cheeses accompanied by a special selection of wine or beer. Wiebe adds, "People can learn much more about our cheeses and we teach them about flavours and pairing the cheeses with the drinks."

The Proefzolder is located at one of the Cheese & More by Henri Willig shops in Amsterdam and opened last April. Currently the sessions start at 4pm daily but in the future Wiebe would like to run more. "If the sessions continue to be as popular as they are now, we would like to do the workshop twice a day," Wiebe confides. "For the next year, we are also making plans to try to bring farm and customer closer together. We want people to become part of the cheese making experience, so buying a cheese at one of our shops becomes much more than just walking in and out of a shop."

henriwillig.com
cheeseandmore.com

FAMKE JANSSEN

Returning to her roots

Whether it is as a femme fatale in the James Bond film *GoldenEye,* as fiery, red-haired Jean Grey in *X-Men* or recently as the imposing Olivia in Netflix's *Hemlock Grove,* Dutch actress Famke Janssen would hardly have escaped anyone's attention. With a modelling and acting career spanning thirty years, this year she will do her first Dutch-language production so *Discover Benelux* asked her what brought her back to her roots.

TEXT: MYRIAM GWYNNED DIJCK | PHOTOS: NETFLIX

After growing up in Amsterdam, Janssen moved to New York in her twenties while she was working as a model. Switching to acting when she turned thirty, an early role that shot Janssen to international fame was in *GoldenEye* in 1995, playing the beautiful and seductive Russian villain Xenia Onatopp. "I knew that after being a 'Bond girl' there would be certain expectations about the rest of your career," she says.

In an attempt to fight through the Bond girl typecasting and saying 'no' to several productions, Janssen began to combine intriguing roles in small independent films with the big blockbuster movies. "At the end of the day, you need to do the big movie roles, because your name means something," she says. "I've fought very hard to maintain career longevity in this industry. I've been very vigilant about the roles I wanted to do."

From comic book to blockbuster

In 2000 this led her to become Jean Grey in *X-Men*, directed by Bryan Singer. At the time, she had no idea that the film would go on to become one of the highest grossing franchises in film history. "Bryan Singer was mainly known for his independent films like *The Usual Suspect*," she says. "Personally, I had no idea either, I didn't know the *X-Men* comics. It was during my research that I realised this is actually really big, and everyone had lots of ideas and opinions about the characters."

The thing that attracted her to the role was the way the story was portrayed in a realistic setting, tackling relatable concepts such as discrimination and intolerance. "It was very different from previous movies of the kind," she says. "Plus, there were many strong roles for women, which you didn't really see either up to that time."

The telekinetic and telepathic Jean Grey had a guest appearance in last year's *Days of Future Past* and also featured one of the Wolverine spinoffs co-starring Hugh Jackman. Janssen says: "She is an interesting but also quite a difficult character to play because everything happens in her head, which is tricky to express. Especially in a movie where all the other characters have such flashy powers."

Rising again and again

Nicknamed the Phoenix, Janssen's character eventually became part of five out of the currently seven *X-Men* franchise movies, despite dying several times. She comments: "That's the beauty of it, you can continue even after your character dies or is killed. This doesn't often happen, but it's happened multiple times with me," she says. "In fact, I actually died four times throughout the *X-Men* movies."

Unfortunately, Janssen is not expected to rise again in the upcoming *X-Men: Apocalypse,* set to be released in 2016. A younger version of Jean Grey is rumoured to be played by Elle Fanning. "I saw it coming. The way *Days of Future Past* ended opened the door to going back in time again. I've heard it might be set in the 80s so then Jean Grey would be much younger than me," she says. "Of course this is a little bittersweet, it would've been nice to be part of it." She adds, "I find Elle Fanning one of the most beautiful girls, so I'd be very happy if she gets picked."

Blood and gore

At the moment Janssen is on set filming the third and last series of the Netflix Original *Hemlock Grove.* Playing family matriarch Olivia Godfrey, we asked Janssen what we can expect. "I can't tell you that, it would ruin everything!" she laughs. "But everyone you expect to return will be back," she says and assures us there won't be a dull moment in the show.

The horror thriller series displays the mysterious world of vampires and werewolves in a very original and sophisticated manner,

ABOVE: Janssen is currently filming the third and final series of the Netflix Original horror thriller *Hemlock Grove*. She plays the imposing and seductive matriarch of the rich Godfrey family, Olivia.

with strong leading characters. The first season resulted in a dark, meandering and somewhat disconcerting storyline. The second season shifted towards being far more graphic, with many extremely bloody scenes. "Personally I'm not a fan of all that gore and horror," she says. "I actually had no idea how extreme it was until it was finished. Thankfully, I didn't have much to do with it in my role."

Taking charge of her career

Having turned 50 last year, Janssen is more determined than ever. Alongside acting, she is trying to focus more on writing and producing. In 2011 she had her directorial debut with *Bringing Up Bobby* and later this year, she hopes to start filming another movie she wrote, a satire based on a novel. "It tends to take very long to get a movie made, especially the kinds of films I want to make the most, that are nothing like big blockbusters," she says.

She says she hopes the writing could eventually take over from her acting. "Especially as when women get older, there are fewer acting roles. I never wanted to just sit by the phone and wait for other people to decide what will happen to my life and my career," she adds decisively. "Taking the initiative suits me well."

It is certainly something she's done very consciously from the very start: "When I stopped with modelling, I thought, now I really need to think about my future." So in the early 1990s Janssen went back to school and studied creative writing and literature at Columbia University. In her spare time she took acting classes. "Becoming a writer has always been in the background," she says, explaining she saw her degree as something to fall back on, "it's now come full circle."

She also believes that having 10 years of modelling experience and a university degree already on her résumé probably helped her acting career in the long run. "When I look around me I notice how difficult it sometimes is for actors and actresses to stay normal once they become successful. But I think being Dutch must've helped me as well to stay grounded," she says.

Janssen never lost track of her heritage, even though she is very much settled in New York where she lives. "I'm still very Dutch, I cycle everywhere, walk everywhere, I still speak Dutch and of course I have family in the Netherlands," she says.

Back to her roots

Despite it all, Janssen has never acted in a Dutch movie, partly because she was already living in New York when she started. "It takes a lot of energy to build a career somewhere," she says. "Had I gone back to the Netherlands, it would have been like starting again from scratch."

This will all change, as Janssen will star in her first Dutch-language movie called *De Held* after Jessica Durlacher's psychological drama novel set in the Second World War. With screenplay by Janssen's younger sister Marjolein Beumer and her older sister Antoinette Beumer as the producer/director, it will be a true family affair. "It is great that I can do this with my sisters. I'm really looking forward to it, it will be our first collaboration," she says.

RIGHT: Actors Famke Janssen and Hugh Jackman attend the *X-Men 3: The Last Stand* premiere at the Palais des Festivals during the 59th International Cannes Film Festival, 2006. Photo: Peter Kramer

"We're all in the same business, so what were we really waiting for?"

In May this year, Janssen will also be part of another production tying in with her Dutch roots. The film, *New Amsterdam* will be a historical adventure with Janssen in the role of Dutch settler Agatha Van Der Donck. "You can imagine what the film is about," she says. "And it is of course very interesting for someone who has actually moved from the Netherlands to America to work in New York – which was first New Amsterdam. It actually surprised me this film hasn't been made before!"

To get rid of her Dutch accent, Janssen actually went to some intensive speech lessens early on. Having perfected her American English over the years, she might have to delve back into her old self to get the accent back. "I don't really know actually, we've not spoken about this yet," she says contemplating the role. "I think it might be tricky to get it back now."

Starring among the stars

More recently, Janssen starred alongside Liam Neeson in action thriller *Taken 3*, the third and last instalment of the franchise. She comments on her role. "It's hardly a surprise as it's already in the trailer – I'll die. But this sets off the entire story. I haven't actually seen it myself, but as you can imagine, it is a much more emotional story especially for Liam's character."

When asked about co-starring films with major star actors like Oscar nominees Neeson and of course Jackman – including doing many bed scenes with him as Wolverine – Janssen laughs and replies: "What I find so fantastic is that I've been so lucky with the actors I have been allowed to work with. They have all been incredibly nice, while there are also many people out there who are not that nice at all."

Released globally on 8 January, Janssen will return as Leonore in *Taken 3*.

SPECIAL THEME

Top summer destinations for early-birds

Although the summer could not seem farther away during the grey days of January, this month is actually the best time to start looking for that perfect summer destination. There is no better way to get rid of the mid-winter blues than by visualising yourself in that sunny holiday location, finding the best early-bird deals and shopping around for the vacation of your dreams.

TEXT: MYRIAM GWYNNED DIJCK | PHOTOS: VAKANTIEBEURS, VAKANTIESALON VLAANDEREN, SALON DES VACANCES

The Vakantiebeurs

The 45th edition of the Vakantiebeurs will give you some amazing ideas in their indoor 'treasure hunt' along sun and sea, culture and nature, adventure and action, simple or exotic. Under the motto 'you'd swear you were already there' visitors can immerse themselves in the atmosphere of their favourite holiday destination. There will be plenty to taste, listen to, experience and enjoy. With a new Personal Travel Advice pavilion, a renovated Cooking Theatre, the popular Culinary Route, Camping by Night campsite experience and of course up-to-date information from experienced travellers and locals from around the world, you can fit the last pieces into your dream holiday puzzle.

When & where:
14-18 January
Jaarbeurs, Utrecht

Tickets:
Adults: €12 advance, €15.50 box office (concessions available for half-day passes)
Children under 16: €5 advance, €6 box office (under 12 go free)

www.vakantiebeurs.nl

Vakantiesalon Vlaanderen

A wealth of wonderful and original holiday ideas await at the Vakantiesalon Vlaanderen (Flanders). Visitors will be gastronomically spoilt during the culinary route and every day fantastic trips will be auctioned off for charity. With over 80,000 visitors, the event is the biggest holiday fair for the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium and it continues to grow with many new national and international exhibitors. Besides the usual popular holiday destinations, the Vakantiesalon will also present theme zones with unique holiday options, including culinary breaks. Every continent will be represented and will tempt visitors with their gastronomical holiday formula. The fair also offers plenty to see and do for the more active holidaymaker, including motorbike, hike and cycle packages.

When & where:
22-26 January
Antwerp Expo

Tickets:
Adults: €7 advance, €10 box office (concessions available for seniors)
Children under 18: €5 advance, €6 box office (under 12 go free)

www.vakantiesalon-vlaanderen.be

Salon des Vacances, Brussels

Find holiday inspiration at the Brussel Salon des Vacances, the biggest holiday fair in Belgium. Discover thousands of exciting and fascinating destinations and book your holiday of dreams at an affordable price. From the mysterious northern lights to tropical cocktails in the Caribbean, a visit to the indoor villages will allow you to taste the entire world, all under one roof. With three theme routes, family, cycling and outdoor holidays, no type of traveller will be left out. Host country this year will be Tunis, a Mediterranean paradise that deserves a spot in the limelight and also France will have a great presence at the fair, showcasing its versatile and stimulating vacation options.

When & where:
5-9 February
Brussels Expo

Tickets:
Adults: €10
Children under 12: free entry

www.vakantiesalon.e

The local area around camping Marius offers a spectacular seafood cuisine, as well as a magnificent nature rich environment.

Sharing a dream

TEXT: MARTIN PILKINGTON | PHOTOS: KARIM SAARI

Half a century ago a young couple started their Provençal campsite almost by accident – people kept asking to stay on their land. Two generations later the location remains equally captivating – though the facilities have changed beyond measure.

Marius and Paulette Susini found their seaside heaven in 1961 when the sailor and his wife, who was a chef, spent their carefully amassed savings on a field 200 metres from the shore at La Couronne near Martigues. Every weekend would be spent building their little house on the land, a tent pitched beside it. And every weekend holiday campers would ask to put their tents and caravans nearby. After two years of hard work they had a new home – and a new campsite.

Today Marius and Paulette's grandchildren Frédéric Cavalier and Joelle Susini are running the site, and they've incorporated their own touches: "We've added a wellness area, and now along with the tent and caravan pitches have some high-end chalets and fully-equipped tents," says Cavalier. "And the restaurant now focuses on great local produce, especially fish and shellfish delivered here fresh daily."

Frédéric says their Belgian clientele – about 10 per cent of the total – is particularly appreciative of that local seafood cuisine, though the biggest draw for many of them is getting near to the creatures in their natural environment rather than at the table. "It's a great spot for divers," he explains: "With the wrecks at Carro to be explored, and lots of fish like bass, John Dory, and even conger seen in the waters here."

The facilities have changed hugely over the years, but there are plenty of constants too, not least the location. A short walk from beautiful beaches and little stony creeks, and with Martigues – called the Venice of Provence for its famous canals – plus the wild Camargue on the doorstep, it's a place for nature lovers and travellers looking for some peaceful moments. That's what attracted those first campers who shared Marius and Paulette's dream of tranquillity: "We're continually improving the services we provide and the welcome for our guests," says Cavalier: "But we've consciously chosen to keep our activities few and simple – for example there's a boule pitch, and we rent out cycles. Our campsite is above all calm and restful, a recipe that brings people back time after time."

www.camping-marius.com

BY THE SEA BREEZE AT

Camping les Dunes

TEXT: BETTINA GUIRKINGER | PHOTOS: DIGIDAAN

Classified as a 4-star camping since 1981, Camping les Dunes provides direct access to the famous long stretch of sandy beaches of Brétignolles sur Mer. Welcoming visitors from April to November, the camping provides well-equipped mobile home rentals fitting four to eight people comfortably, with television sets, sheets, blankets and electric heating. Wi-Fi is also available upon request.

For those feeling a bit more adventurous, thirty different pitching spots are available for tents and caravans, with easy access to water and electricity.

As for entertainment and the animation programme, the camping has everything in place to make it a memorable stay for guests of all ages and interests. Creative workshops are organised for the smaller ones aged two to 12, along with a weekly show to make their parents proud. Teenagers can enjoy different team sports from football to basketball and volleyball while making new friends. On top of this, the camping has its own heated indoor and outdoor aquatic park for extra fun for the whole family.

From the camping there is the possibility to go on several hikes among the surrounding dunes and marshland, with all the information provided at the reception where the staff can advise you on trails to follow. If you are more of the two-wheeled type, ask for a bike rental and enjoy the beautiful cycling tracks of the Vendée region, among gorgeous landscapes and breathtaking views.

And of course, being right next to the beach, one can enjoy many afternoons in the sea or sunbathing, while the sporty ones can try out surfing or kite-surfing – the conditions are ideal for both beginners and more experienced surfers.

The region is also famous for its cultural sites, such as museums and churches, to dive more deeply into the history of the Vendée. If you come with children, the world-famous theme park Puy du Fou is within an hour and a half away by car for a day trip.

With great facilities, access to the beach and ideal location at the heart of the Vendee, the Camping les Dunes awaits your visit! Go to the website for more information, available in French, English, Dutch and German.

www.campinglesdunes.fr

Where nature is comfortable

TEXT: HARUN OSMANOVIC | PHOTOS: DOMAINE DU PRÉ

Every summer season, hundreds of families from the Benelux travel to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean in the French Vendée region, to find a quiet haven of peace and nature. The Domaine du Pré has the advantage of being just fifteen kilometres away from the beach of Saint Gilles Croix yet also on the shores of the lake of Jaunay, making the site ideal for a relaxing time in the middle of a protected nature reserve.

With its brand new facilities – built in 2011 – the Domaine du Pré offers many activities for all types of visitors. At the heart of the park you will find a 500 square metre artificial lake with sandy beaches, water games for kids, paddling areas and a deeper water area for adults to swim. Between July and August, the Domaine du Pré offers a club for kids with regular activities after which the entire family can meet for delicious local cuisine served at the park's restaurant.

The facilities are all equipped with tasteful modern furniture: studios for two, cottages for up to eight guests, the Domaine du Pré can accommodate your every need. All the equipment for babies and toddlers can be provided and is available on site in family cottages. If you want to keep more to yourselves with all-inclusive services – cleaning, bed linen and more – ask for the Privilege cottage for a peaceful and relaxing stay. Whatever your preference, the Domaine du Pré will surely invigorate you and yours because nature is comfortable.

www.domainedupre.com

Full days and stomachs in Les Landes

TEXT: MARTIN PILKINGTON | PHOTOS: CAMPING LE TATIOU

Concluding that Dutch and Belgian campers who return to Camping Le Tatiou year after year do so because the flat Landes country reminds them of home is too simplistic. After all, the nearby beach of Lespecier is unlike anything in the Netherlands, and few will live in surroundings as naturally beautiful as the site's scented pine woods.

"People across the age range are attracted by the friendly family atmosphere here," says reception manager Nathalie Mengé: "And there are loads of things to do. Within the site we have two playgrounds for kids and teenagers, superb sports facilities, outdoor fitness area for adults, a great swimming pool and paddling pool, and of course you can also play boules. And in the evening we have activities like dancing, karaoke, and theatre for everyone!"

Nearby there's an adventure park, paintball and archery are available, plus a network of cycle paths links to neighbouring towns and Lespecier beach. The Bias site has naturally evolved since it opened in 1974, these days offering 'campétoiles' (small tents on stilts), bungalows, and mobile homes, along with spacious pitches for touring caravans and tents.

It's nice to feel at home, but on holiday it's great to sample local specialities, which at Le Tatiou only requires a stroll to the restaurant: "They serve plenty of regional dishes like duck confit and 'salade Landaise' with duck breast and gizzards if guests fancy a taste of the South West," says Nathalie. "But if they want simple home cooking we've got a mini-mart too – or simpler still, roast chicken and French fries to take away!"

www.campingletatiou.com

An escape to nature and leisure

TEXT: BETTINA GUIRKINGER | PHOTOS: DOMAINE LA GARENNE

The family-owned 4-star camping Domaine la Garenne was built to guarantee peace and quiet to its visitors from April to October. Spread over a large area of 14 hectares with plenty of space to ensure privacy between campers, it is the perfect summer getaway.

Ideally located in the hills of the Drôme des Collines in south-eastern France, and surrounded by beautiful oak and pine trees, campers can bring their own tents or caravans and make their choice of location among the 40 pitch sites available, with access to sanitary facilities, free hot showers and electricity. Otherwise, guests are welcome to make their pick among a range of mobile homes and chalets, fitting between two to eight people comfortably. These are built in sustainable and eco-friendly materials, mostly wood, to guarantee comfort and quality.

Particularly family-friendly and free for children under 3, the camping has its own two swimming pools as well as a paddling pool and a large range of sports facilities including a football pitch, an area to play the traditional pétanque, a ping-pong table and a trampoline.

With activities organised by the staff during the day, parents can relax at the bar and regroup with the family at the catering service available every evening during the high season of July-August.

Although relaxing by the pool or grabbing a book from the camping library (available in French and Dutch) is always an option, there are plenty of activities to enjoy during your stay at Domaine la Garenne such as hikes leaving from the camping, bike rental to explore the region, horse-riding in the surrounding nature or a visit to nearby Valence.

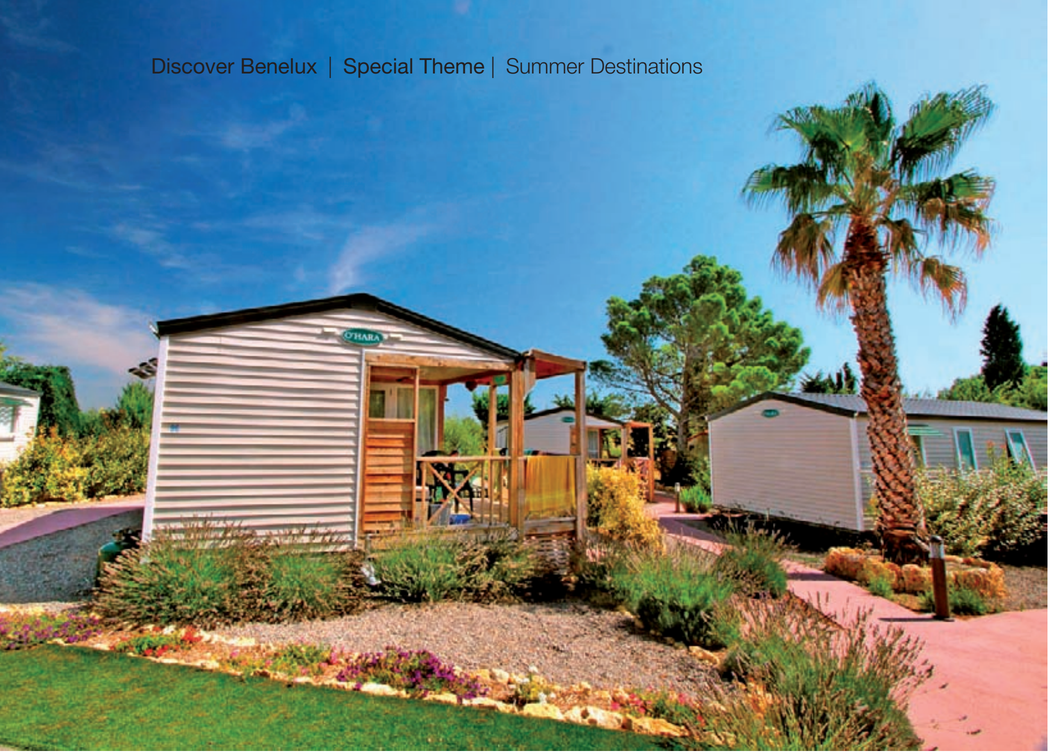
Also available in the surrounding area is the beautiful artwork of Facteur Cheval – a unique castle to visit with the children in an afternoon, after delighting your senses at the Cité du Chocolat in nearby Tain l'Hermitage.

For those seeking a more local culinary experience, the baker will provide you with fresh bread in the morning and local farmers come by twice a week with fresh fruit and vegetables. On top of this, you can buy fully organic goat cheese and honey provided from the farms nearby, which are also open for visitors.

The camping Domaine la Garenne has something to offer to all, from children to adults, in the idyllic setting of the Drôme des Collines.

Please go to the website – available in French, English and Dutch – for more information and bookings.

www.domaine-la-garenne.com



Summertime dreaming

When hearing about the wonderful location of camping La Nautique, in the south of France, it is tempting to wish away the cold winter days. The campsite in Languedoc-Roussillon is situated in a beautiful nature reserve, just a stone's throw away from a large inland sea along the Mediterranean coast where flamingos are dotted around the beaches.

TEXT: MYRIAM GWYNNED DIJCK | PHOTOS: CAMPING LA NAUTIQUE

La Nautique is also surrounded by picturesque fishing villages and acres of vineyards that produce the region's excellent Corbières wines. Located nearby the former Roman stronghold of Narbonne and in the middle of the Cathar Country with its magnificent castles, there is also plenty to see for culture enthusiasts. "From fishing to wind surfing, sightseeing and wine tasting, there is something here for everyone," says camping co-owner Miriam Malquier.

But its location is just one aspect of La Nautique's appeal. The family-run camping was set up in 1995 after the former neglected campsite was completely rebuilt. Starting with two stars when they opened, La Nautique now boasts four stars and has an almost endless number of facilities on site. "There is a bar, shop and restaurant, swimming pool and paddling pool, beach volleyball and tennis courts, ping-pong tables, mini golf site, football pitch, pétanque area, playgrounds and we have Wi-Fi covering over 70 per cent of the site," Malquier says.

The 16-hectare site has 270 normal camping pitches – each with private washroom, shower and toilet facilities – and 120 rental mobile homes. A unique feature of La Nautique is that every facility and several of its mobile homes and chalets are wheelchair accessible. "In 2005 we were the first campsite in the south of France to gain the 'Tourisme & Handicap' quality label. We also rent out wheelchairs, both normal and electrical ones and wheelchairs for in the water," Malquier continues.

During the high season, the camping hosts a range of daily entertainment and kids' club activities, including night openings of the swimming pool, foam parties, ghost walks, live music and more. Six times a week in July and August, the camping's mascots Charlie and Kiwi pick up the children for the Cool Kids activities, for adolescents there are sports championships and adults can enjoy Zumba, aerobics and aqua gym classes. Malquier concludes, "There is always something going on. All our activities are aimed at an international audience and we also always try to have speakers of Dutch, English, French and German on shift every day."

La Nautique is currently taking bookings for the 2015 season and will open on 1 March.

www.campinglanautique.com

A place of many wonders

Located in the Rhone-Alpes region, in the south-east of France, the camping site Au Pré du Lac has become a destination of choice for vacationers coming from the Benelux and looking for a piece of nature.

TEXT: HARUN OSMANOVIC | PHOTOS: AU PRÉ DU LAC

Nearing three natural lakes, it is on the shores of the largest of them that you will be able to grab a spot right under the sun on a lawn that makes for a unique grass beach. Standing at the entrance of the camping, right before you is the lake Laffrey, still, ages-old and that seems to run as far as the eye can see, all the way to the foothills of Alpe du Grand Serre.

In the water, everyone finds joy. You will be able to enjoy the quietness of a fishing party or swim in the crystal clear water of the lake which reaches depths of forty metres allowing for wonderful scuba diving expeditions. The camping rents out canoes for a ride on the lake but for more serious sailors, sailboats are available at the Cholonge, the nearby sailing club.

For hikers and bike riders, the scenery of the area is breathtaking. From the flanks of the Alpe du Grand Serre the panoramic view will amaze you with its pictorial French paysage. "Besides the beauty of the region, we have a lot of guests who are interested in its history," says Pascal Couderc, owner of the camping.

Indeed near the camping are the remnants of the mining past of the region but more importantly the camping is on the road that Napoleon took on his way out from captivity. "Starting March 2015, which marks the 200 year anniversary of Napoleon's journey, events will be held throughout the road, especially in Laffrey which saw Napoleon encounter the army of the King, a crucial event in French history."

The Camping Au Pré du Lac is an all-in-one location: Via ferrata alpine routes, climbing, 300 kilometres of marked hiking paths, roads and sceneries to delight bikers and horse riders, sailing, diving… the list never ends. So make sure to mark it on your next holiday trip and discover the majesty of the Matheysine region.

www.aupredulac.eu

An escape to nature

and a home away from home

TEXT: BETTINA GUIRKINGER | PHOTOS: MOULIN DE SURIER

Winner of the 2014 Zoover Award, the 4-star camping Moulin de Surier is one of the 25 top campings out of 8,500 in the whole of France. Ideally located in the beautiful region of Dordogne-Périgord, here are at least 25 reasons to make this your destination this summer.

Having been a campsite for twenty years, the Moulin du Surier came under new management last July who have given it a new life, with further plans to make it even better. Open throughout spring, summer and autumn, the location is close to magical: spread over eight hectares and surrounded by lush green nature, two lakes and a hundred year-old windmill that gives the camping its name, it has everything to please the eye and the senses.

Guests can pick between different types of chalets and mobile homes fitting between four and eight people comfortably, and with spacious interiors to avoid being on top of each other and enjoy a stress-less holiday. The camping will also turn to 'glamping' in 2015 – a more glamorous style of camping with appropriate, luxurious types of accommodation available on site.

As for activities and services, the camping has it all: ping-pong tables, tennis, volleyball, BBQs, swimming in the lake or the pool, fishing for children and professionals, bike rentals a whole range of board games to enjoy with family or friends. Next to one of the lakes is a bar-restaurant called La Gingette where you can order lunch or dinner from June to September. The swimming pool has its own bar with a collection of refreshments and snacks which can be ordered as takeaways. La Guingette's is also the meeting point for evening entertainment: shows with professional artists, disco, karaoke and much more.

The uniqueness of the site also resides in the exclusive access to privately-owned Chateau de Bannes located nearby. Under staff guidance, guests are invited to light a lantern and, together, make a night walk in the gardens of the chateau – an adventure for children and a delight for grown-ups.

On top of this, the region has its fair share of cultural, historical and geological activities given the impressive number of castles and caves nearby. For the sporty type, there is the possibility to go on horse-riding treks, hiking, fishing, play golf, rent quads or organise an afternoon of cycling with the family.

So for the perfect holiday destination look no further and visit the website (in French, Dutch and English).

www.lemoulindesurier.com

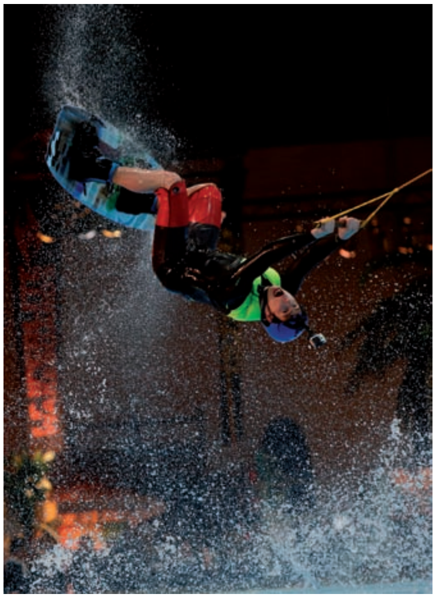
Set sail to the Benelux and beyond

With thousands of kilometres of coastline, inland waterways, lakes, canals and rivers, the Benelux is a wonderfully water rich region. The Dutch and Belgian sea shores in particular have been popular for centuries, not only for naval transport but also for leisure yachtsmen, from novices to veterans.

TEXT: MYRIAM GWYNNED DIJCK | PHOTOS: BOOT DÜSSELDORF, BELGIAN BOAT SHOW

While the summer is still far away, the beginning of the year is the perfect time to start mapping your vacation and select a boat that fits your favourite journey. If you already have a vessel for your voyage, then there are always new routes to take, innovative accessories to learn about and unexpected destinations to discover.

Sports like water and jet skiing, wakeboarding, fishing and other nautical activities are also well represented along the Benelux seashores and waterways. Covering all these aspects are two major events happening this winter. First there is ‘boot Dusseldorf’ in late January, shortly followed by the Belgian Boat Show in February. For every maritime enthusiast these spectacular shows are not to be missed!



BOOT DÜSSELDORF

Craving sun, wind, waves and the sea? Europe's largest yachting and water sports fair will get you in the mood for summertime fun. With 1,650 exhibitors from 60 countries, 'boot Dusseldorf' is truly a 360° water sports experience. Shipyards, distributors and importers will present their boats, canoes, dinghies and glamorous luxury yachts. Ride the waves on your surfboard, relax in a canoe, go fishing, diving, or set sail on a fabulous cruise – in Düsseldorf, the dreams of every yachting and water sports fan come true.

When & where:
17-25 January
Düsseldorf Exhibition Centre

Tickets:
Adults: €15 advance, €20 box office
(concessions available for weekday tickets and two-day passes)

www.boot.de

BELGIAN BOAT SHOW

This year, the 27th Belgian Boat Show will have an even wider variety of exhibitors and is expected to attract over 30,000 visitors. This exclusive, national nautical lifestyle event presents sailing and motor yachts, hundreds of new cabin cruisers, RIBs powerboats, jet skis, along with a selection of high quality used boats.

There will also be prizes to win and visitors bringing their wetsuits can have a go at the biggest indoor lake the Wavesurfer, creating water waves of up to three metres high.

When & where:
14-16 and 20-22 February
Flanders Expo, Gent

Tickets:
Adults: €10 advance, €12 box office
(group concessions available)
Children under 16: free entrance
(under parental guidance)

www.belgianboatshow.be

The perfect nautical experience

A good looking yacht that suits all your needs perfectly is what you aim for when you have your own ship built. Leiden-based yacht designer Guido de Groot knows how to incorporate your demands into the most beautiful and practical boat you have ever seen.

TEXT: JANINE STERENBORG | PHOTOS: GUIDO DE GROOT DESIGN

"Designing a yacht is always a combination of aesthetics and technique," explains De Groot, owner and founder of Guido de Groot Design. "We strongly listen to our clients' wishes, work closely with engineers and combine the needs of both into one design. The result must always be a yacht that is the prom queen of the harbour, because everything in the design is right. The proportions and views from all sides must be perfect."

Guido de Groot Design designs both interiors and exteriors for yachts. "Every design is custom. Our clients have a list of demands, for example how big it should be, whether it should be a fast or a slow yacht and what it will be used for." Some yachts are meant for short stays on board, others for long ones. "And different people live differently," he continues. "We discuss the needs of our clients with them and based on all the information we receive, we determine for example how many cabins should be in the yacht, how big the galley should be, but also the look and feel of the ship. Thanks to our many years of experience, we know how people live on a yacht, so we understand our clients' wishes well."

Guido de Groot Design started in 1997 and specialises in innovative interiors and exteriors for luxury motor and sailing yachts. De Groot started out as a car designer: "this gave me a good understanding of shapes and surfaces and a keen sense for 3D objects. My love affair with yachts began back in 1986 when I saw the fourth 'Highlander' close to completion at the De Vries Feadship yard. Awestruck by the majesty of this 45-metre masterpiece, I started drawing yachts parallel with my career in car design. The next decade I spent learning everything there was to know about luxury yachts."

The experience and knowledge that is present within the company, has its impact

on the clientele. "We collaborate with prestigious shipyards in the Netherlands, Italy, China, Russia, Taiwan and Turkey and our clients come from all over the world," he says.

When starting out with a new client, De Groot starts with logical steps: "Each project starts with several meetings with our client. We need to get a good understanding of what the client wants and needs. After that we start to draw preliminary concept drawings. At this stage, the exploration of ideas is quite free: we wish to push the boundaries and at all times produce good and interesting solutions." After this, De Groot presents the designs to the client. The best one will be developed further. "That's when 3D computer programming comes in. This allows us to make visuals for both the exterior and interior of the yacht. This way we make it much easier for the client to get an idea of the potential boat, long before the vessel has begun construction."

Over the years, Guido de Groot Design has designed a large number of yachts. The design studio now employs seven people, all with a love for yachting and a background in industrial design, engineering or architecture. By now, the team designs about eight yachts per year. "Besides designs requested by clients, we develop our own conceptual yachts. We make something we think is innovative, something that might hit the market or something we think is interesting to clients."

Through the years, the focus on what is important in a yacht has changed slightly. "Because of the financial crisis, it has become more and more important to focus on becoming more innovative to attract potential clients. This, together with the fact that international safety regulations for yachts have changed, has led to better yachts and better designs."

Another shift De Groot sees is the demand for 'toys'. "Submarines on board are starting to become popular," says De Groot and adds: "the accommodation of these has an impact on the appearance of future yachts." A submarine might sound extreme, but many requests have passed De Groot's ears. "We've built yachts that can go 50 knots (which is over 100 kilometres per hour) for example."

After spending almost thirty years in the yachting business, De Groot hardly ever blinks an eye at what might seem like extreme requests. "We have seen it all. Besides, a request is a challenge, not a problem." Talking about challenges: "We are not easily shocked by requests!" De Groot hints.

www.guidodegroot.com

For a true experience of the sea, choose Wauquiez Yachts

Wauquiez is a name, a brand, and more importantly a tradition in the art of crafting luxurious sailing boats of the highest quality. With 50 years of history and constantly creating new designs and improving their current models, a sailing yacht *signé* Wauquiez is likely to become your next big investment.

TEXT: BETTINA GUIRKINGER | PHOTOS: WAUQUIEZ

Founded in 1965 because of Henri Wauquiez's love for the quality and speed of sailing boats, the shipyard grew rapidly and soon started exporting to the UK, Germany and Scandinavia from its workshop in northern France. This was also the result of a close collaboration with British architects to make the designs both efficient, safe and beautiful. Today, the luxury brand is stronger than ever in the creation of semi-custom models, meant to fit everyone's aim and ambition: from a yacht for four to five yearly leisure trips on the Mediterranean Sea to a ship fit for a full-scale crossing of the Atlantic or a sailing trip in the Caribbean – Wauquiez has it all.

Satisfying your sailing ambitions

Some of the models available are all-time classics, such as the Centurion, which gave birth to the Gladiator models 9, 10 and 11. Built for performance and comfort, this beauty possesses a slender hull, sleek lines, a low, discreet roof and a cockpit and deck designed for manoeuvring and relaxing. With a powerful build, thoroughbred and as steerable as a racing yacht, the result is a perfect mixture of comfort, elegance and strength.

Other popular models include the Pilot Saloon, Opium and Optio. The Pilot Saloon stands out by her elegance and innovation, both above and below deck. She offers an aft cockpit and owners' cabin, as well a panoramic view from the saloon, which offers optimal interior lighting and exceptional sea views. The hull is made of sandwich fiberglass/balsa, using the vacuum infusion technique: unidirectional and complex quadri-axial and UD glass-fabrics infused with vinylester resin, and impregnated, vertical balsa ensure further lightness and strength. The vinylester resin and gel coat suppress osmosis phenomena. The deck is processed with the same technique, but with PVC foam instead of balsa for further weight reduction above the waterline.

The Opium on the other hand is far more suitable for cruising, racing or a voyage. Her speed, safety and comfort make her an ideal option for longer adventures. On top of this, she gives the feeling of home away from home through her luxurious and spacious interior which successfully combines waxed teak and composite materials.

Finally, the Optio stands out as the first Daysailer created by the brand, and incorporates all the hallmark features. Among

others, she boasts unmistakable sophistication, luxury and craftsmanship. Furthermore, the Optio has been resolutely designed for high performance, given her progressive chine hull and sleek deck; the standard model includes full racing equipment. A joy to the senses!

A work of art

While it is extremely important for the craftsmen at Wauquiez to be at the high end of technical and technological developments, this shouldn't come at the cost of comfort and elegance. This is why the interiors are treated with the same care and attention to detail as the rest of the boat along the creation line. No concessions are made on the materials purchased and every creation is treated as a work of art.

When most Wauquiez debutantes walk into a boat the first thing that comes to them is the delicate smell of the bees wax. It is purchased from a nearby abbey with hundreds of years of tradition and used for the wooden elements of the space. This is only one of the many details that are given special care and love.

The interior just shows how much pride a Wauquiez craftsman takes in a job well done. Bulkheads and cabinetwork are fitted and varnished with the most precise attention, which make the work as pleasing to the eye as to the touch... Everything is done in the most classic and traditional way of sailing construction, with all pieces assembled manually, for greater precision and aesthetics.

A winning combination

Nominated for the prize of the European Yacht of the Year in the luxury category and close to what could be called 'the Oscars of watersports', Wauquiez is in tough competition with the crême de la crême of boat makers, which already says a lot about the standard it has already achieved.

Eventually what will always make the luxury brand stand out is its winning combination of high-tech and tradition, with the aim to keep 'surprising' new and old customers and stay relevant in the elite world of yacht craftsmanship. Never out-dated, never out of fashion, you are invited to join the Wauquiez experience and find out more online (available in French and English).

www.wauquiez.com

VÉLOFOLLIES

The Benelux's biggest bicycle fair

Out on the streets, you notice the difference, the number of cyclists keeps on increasing in Belgium. More and more people are clearly taking to the bike, either as a way of transport or as relaxation. Never before did the cycle unions count as many members as they do now, across every age range.

TEXT & PHOTOS: VÉLOFOLLIES

That cycling is one of the most popular pastime activities can be seen at the bicycle fair Vélofollies like nowhere else. For the ninth consecutive time, this annual cycling event will take place in the Kortrijk Xpo, Belgium, a bicycle bonanza at the top of every cycle enthusiast's agenda in the Benelux.

Filled to the brim

With over 275 exhibitors, Vélofollies is not only the biggest but also most varied bicycle fair in the Benelux. Next to race bikes and mountain bikes, the event stretching 40,000 square metres also offers a wealth of travel bikes, city bikes and electric bikes, supplemented by a full array of accessories, cycle clothing, trips and advice.

Vélofollies is a paradise for the cycle enthusiast, representing all the major brands in the field, including Shimano, Campagnolo, Trek, Cannondale, Ridley and Merckx. Each will display their full range at the fair along with their latest products, developments and trends. For national and international brands in Europe, Vélofollies is the bicycle fair of choice.

Also recreational cyclists will have plenty to see and do with a large number of children's bikes, retro bikes and city bikes on display by household names such as Oxford, Batavus and Miverva as well as new brands Koga and Gazelle.

Tried and tested

Because of the growing popularity of the electrical bike, the organisers created an indoor e-bike track in a separate large hall. This way even more bikes can be tried out at the varied track. For more information and advice regarding e-bikes, workshops

Vélofollies is a true bicycle bonanza and the highlight of the year for many cycling fans in the Benelux. From clothing and accessories to every type of bicycle you can think of, all aspects of biking will be represented at the fair.

will be held at the fair tackling common questions like battery use and charging capacity.

For more adventurous BMX riders, these can also be tested at a pump track at the Rambla. Under supervision, visitors can try several off-road bikes and test their capabilities. Then for children there will be a chance to make a first round on a bicycle at the Belaey Trials Academy. Vélofollies clearly offers something for all ages.

More than cycling

On top of the latest collections and trends, the fair will be peppered with fascinating activities like chat sessions with current and retired professional cyclists, team performances, workshops and autograph sessions. Several stars of competitive cycling will attend, including Niels Albert, Rob Peeters and predicted Tour de France winner Wout Van Aert. Felici Gimondi will celebrate the 50th anniversary of his tour victory, and also the Bike of the Year will be launched.

When & where:

Kortrijk Xpo, Belgium
16-18 January

Tickets:

Adults: €10 advance, €14 box office
Children under 12: €5 advance,
€7 box office (under 6 go free)

www.velofolies.be

AMSTERDAM

Europe's most bike-friendly capital city

TEXT & PHOTOS: PHIL GALE

One of the first things that springs to mind when anyone mentions Amsterdam is its bikes. You know a city has many bikes when its local authorities state there are well over 600,000 but "we cannot tell for sure". As soon as you arrive at the city's central station it is clear that this is a population that moves on two wheels, as flanking the station are numerous multi-story bicycle parking areas.

Unlike London, where the riders battle with the mass of cars, buses and trucks, Amsterdam's policy on bikes is different. Compared to Greater London, Amsterdam is tiny, yet it has over 400 kilometres of bike lanes, separated from the traffic.

Amsterdam council's tolerance and tendency to embrace all things cycling is reflected in the riders' styles. There are very few, if any, Lycra and high vis-clad riders racing with the traffic. Instead, Amsterdamers can be seen cruising around on their relaxed Dutch bikes at a more leisurely speed and in normal clothes – sometimes on the phone, sometimes carrying umbrellas to shelter from the rain – while the number of riders wearing helmets can be counted on one hand.

The question then must be asked: "how come things are so different in Holland's capital?" It isn't hard to see where Amsterdam's passion for the bike comes

from; with an intensely compact, flat city, with numerous, narrow, twisting streets, driving a car is clearly a disadvantage. Added to that is the fact that bikes take priority over cars, a mentality that is light years away from London (and the UK as a whole), where the car is king. It is then no surprise either that 68 per cent of all journeys are made on two wheels in Amsterdam.

All of this leads to a pleasant, safe and enjoyable environment to ride a bike in. There are very few incidents between cars and bikes in this city. *Discover Benelux* even spotted a cyclist run a red light in the path of an approaching police car, where the police officer kindly stopped and apologised to the rider for being close to him, while technically it was the cyclist who was wrong. An interesting scene to observe, but also a reflection of the mentality that is at the core of this bike-friendly city.

Everyone in Amsterdam rides a bike, they have done so all their lives. When they drive a car they understand the vulnerable position of cyclists compared to motor vehicles. So it is the car that gives way: a great model that all major cities in Europe should take note of.

velofollies

The bike show for the cyclist and cycling enthusiast.

16-18 JAN 2015

#velofollies

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Kortrijk Xpo

www.velofollies.be

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NBCC

Merida

More bike, more fun!

TEXT: EMMIE COLLINGE | PHOTOS: MERIDA

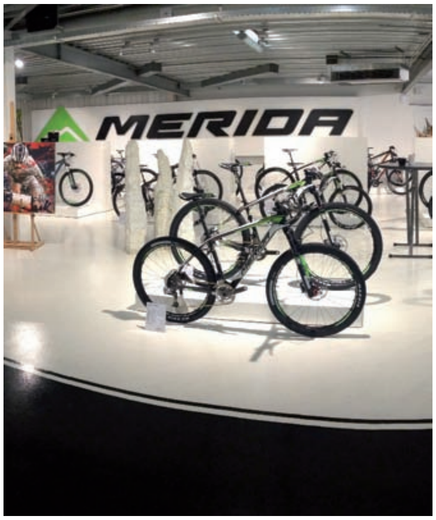
Merida, the long-established Taiwanese bicycle producer, has stood for decades at the top of its game – and podiums too. Synonymous with the world's best value mountain bikes, its focus has widened to incorporate ultra-lightweight, high performance aero road bikes, coveted carbon frames, a streamlined women's range and its own World Tour team.

When the eminent mountain bike manufacturer announced its intention to develop road bikes, cyclists of the world listened. Known for its innovation and proficiency, with over three decades of experience contained within some of the world's most advanced bicycle production facilities, we were sure Merina would create something special.

A complete line-up of MTB and Racing bikes is available for ladies, an often overlooked market.

Launching its first complete road bike collection in 2010 was a huge undertaking but one which the world's second largest bicycle manufacturer relished. Now with the Reacto, Scultura and Ride series, each out performing more established road brands, Merida is rightly proud. From the Benelux headquarters in Apeldoorn, we caught up with head of Benelux, Peter Koperdraad, whose outspoken love for the sport is contagious. "More people than ever are out cycling and the beauty of the sport is that there are no constraints, no time boundaries or limitations," explains Koperdraad. "There's a freedom associated with cycling that is worth discovering."

With the research and development headquarters in Germany and the manufacturing HQ in Yuanlin, Taiwan, Merida's expertise is unmatched. "We've got the best of both worlds. The production facilities in Taiwan are so clean you could eat off the floors – even entering the paint line requires entrance through high pressure cabins to remove dust particles," he says incredulously.



At the "state of the art" factory in Taiwan, bicycles are produced to the highest standards.

With development as their key principle, it is the German R&D team of 20 designers and product managers who are responsible for the brand's new offerings to the cycling market. With mountain bikes as their core products, their forays into road bikes, sports e-bikes, cyclocross bikes and children's bikes have proved worthy expansions, aided and abetted by the team's world-class mountain bike team, the Multivan Merida Biking Team. Producing mountain bikes with both the 27.5 and 29 inch wheel size they have every variable on offer to suit any type of off-road rider.

With road racing's rapid growth, Merida's choice to sign up as the title sponsor of the Italian World Tour team Lampre-Merida was a wise one. Since 2013 the brand has benefitted greatly from access to the peloton, the elite group of cyclists who take on the world's grand tours. "We've spent time in wind tunnels, looking at positions and dimensions to determine the influence of the body and the bike on its speed," he explains. With their presence on the roads cemented and their prominence in this discipline apparent, Koperdraad is excited about the team's set-up for 2015 on Merida's highest-specification bike, the full carbon Reacto, whose aerodynamic gains are a feat of the German R&D know-how, weeks of rigorous testing by the team and the Taiwanese manufactory's expertise.

All these advancements trickle down immediately, meaning that amateur riders benefit equally from the brand's serious skills. After the Reacto, there's the Scultura (available in carbon or alloy), ideal for serious riders and optimally designed for comfort on those longer (120 kilometres or more) rides with the perfect balance of lightness and stiffness. Alternatively, for road riders who are after added comfort, there is the Ride series, with its slightly more upright positioning that would have you believing that the yellow jersey is within your grasp.

Merida's 29-er, carbon frame, Fox suspension and the new Shimano XTR groupset 2x 11, now available

With the introduction of their female-specific road and mountain bike range, Merida have tapped into an often overlooked market. Steering clear of typically 'girly' colour schemes, the Merida bikes have sacrificed neither design nor performance, making them basically a unisex equivalent with a marginally smaller frame. The lower bottom bracket, shorter handlebar stem and softer front suspension combine to create mountain bikes that are far more suited to women.

Combining the R&D skills of their German office with the production know-how of their Taiwanese office, Merida offers bikes that have not only been designed to suit any rider – but any budget too. Not stopping there, they also want to share their expertise and passion for all things two-wheeled through their Benelux-based test centre.

www.merida.nl
www.merida.com

Inspired to start cycling but unsure of where to begin?

With thousands of bikes to choose from, it can be quite overwhelming, agrees Koperdraad. Just 85 kilometres from Amsterdam, the Merida Benelux Experience Centre can be found in the Netherlands's largest forest, the Veluwe – meaning that door-to-trail riding is done with ease.

The Experience Centre, the first of its kind within cycling, can be compared to test-driving a car: "You'd never consider not test-driving a car, but that's what's expected with bikes – until we opened the Experience Centre that is. Chat to your local dealer first, they'll set up an appointment here for you. Once you arrive your desired bike will be ready with GPS and route navigation on your handlebars, leaving you free to ride for a couple of hours. Once you return, you can shower, relax in the café and discuss bikes with us."

Webshop (Benelux only):
www.meridawebshop.nl
Contact: info@merida.nl

Benelux's top folder

TEXT: EMMIE COLLINGE | PHOTOS: BUZAGLO

Held up as a beacon within the world of two wheels, it is the country's overwhelmingly warm attitude to cycling and its benefits along with its infrastructure and manufacturing, that have rendered the Netherlands a veritable treasure trove of bicycle-related products – and one which continues to grow thanks to Almere-based Buzaglo.

The importer of choice for Benelux's cycling distributors, for Buzaglo the sport's rise in popularity couldn't have come at a better time. Director Frank Konijn explains how Buzaglo's own steady growth has been mirrored by that of cycling's. Since it began, Buzaglo has held exclusive import rights for many rising Asian brands, including Dahon folding bikes, Tektro brakes, Velo saddles and Minoura's home trainers to name a few.

Almost exclusive access to the ever-improving Asian manufacturing market has been greatly beneficial to the Buzaglo team, who have spent the past few decades contributing their own knowledge of the industry and fusing it with Asia's unmatched manufacturing efficiency. "We've been Europe's sole Dahon service centre for many years," explains Konijn, "and few know their products as well as we do. We perform all the Europe-based repairs here in Almere and have a huge range of bikes in stock."

Folding bikes, the preferred mode of transport for a growing proportion of the population and ideal for cities like Amsterdam, Luxembourg City and Brussels, have witnessed a huge rise in demand over recent years and no more so than for the Taiwanese brand of Dahon. Despite the competition on the market, Dahon folding bikes are applauded for their comfort, rideability and forward-thinking designs, making them one of the world's most coveted folding bike brands. Dating back 25 years, the Dahon product range spans all sizes (16, 20, 24 and 26 inches), all prices and all purposes, with folding commuter bikes, folding mountain bikes and folding e-bikes too.

Not content just importing their passion, the Buzaglo team impart it as well with their own brands, creating highly sought-after and much needed parts and accessories. Nigh on every single item required by a cyclist is catered for in their broad and popular ranges with IKZI lights providing the necessary illuminations, Nietverkeerd (it's not bad) panniers, and their children's line of bike accessories, PeXKids, to make cycling that bit safer and that bit more fun.

buzaglo.nl

ABOVE LEFT: The Ciao was the *Bike of the Year 2006* in the Netherlands – the highest prize a bicycle can get – and now also available as an electric bike.

Eliminating saddle pain

If you ever spent a few hours riding a road bike, you know your muscles as well as your buttocks will be in pain after sitting in the saddle that long. The one hundred percent natural body care products of QM Sports Care relieve pain in the muscles and soften pain of an irritated skin.

TEXT: JANINE STERENBORG | PHOTOS: QM SPORTS CARE

The ointments and creams of QM Sports Care are the first fully natural sports care products available. "Over ten years ago I noticed a gap in the market for high quality body care products for sportsmen and women," explains QM Sports Care founder Johan van Steendam. With a background in aromatherapy, a Master's degree in physiotherapy and a career as amateur cyclist, the QM product line is a logical outcome of this observation.

Many professional cyclists and other sportsmen and women already enjoy the benefits of the QM Sports Care line, thanks to a sponsorship deal with the Pro Tour cycling teams Etixx-Quick Step and Katusha. "Among the cyclists are the famous Tom Boonen, Alexander Kristoff and Joaquim Rodriguez," adds Van Steendam. "Other QM enthusiasts are Frederik Van Lierde, winner of Iron Man in Hawaii in 2013, and Kelly Druyts, world champion scratch 2014."

The base of essential oils is the distinctive feature of the QM Sports Care products. Van Steendam explains the advantages of this: "Your skin is waterproof, so it can't absorb water, but it can absorb the volatile essential oils. The oil ends up in your bloodstream, so they can make a difference in the muscles." The ingredients of the ointments and creams depend on the goal of the products. A perfect cream for this cold time of year is the Hot Embrocation. Van Steendam: "It's a warming lotion to use in cold or wet circumstances. Its ingredients are red pepper, mint and eucalyptus to heat the muscles, and menthol makes your skin feel refreshed, so it does not subtract heat from the muscles."

This month, two new products will be released. "We call them 'pants creams' in Belgium. They're made to protect the buttocks against irritation and friction. We made it after receiving requests from professional cyclists. For gentlemen, the Pro Race Chamois Cream is available, and for women we created the first creams especially for females: the Ladies Choice Chamois Cream."

QM Sports Care will be attending the cycling fair Vélofollies in Kortrijk, Belgium, from Friday 16 to Sunday 18 January (see our Out & About calendar on page 64 for more information).

www.qmsportscare.com

Bespoke wheels from Belgian experts

From his well-loved workshop just outside of Flanders' Aalst, master wheelbuilder and cycling aficionado Kris Seminck explains that the process of wheel building is a craft form that cannot be rushed.

TEXT: EMMIE COLLINGE | PHOTOS: SWS CYCLING

The SWS story started in 2006 and combines a passion for cycling, craftsmanship, high quality components and specific technical knowledge. After an extensive discussion with the client, SWS wheels are produced entirely by hand and designed to enhance your ride for years to come, and clients take extreme pride in Kris' workmanship.

"Mass manufactured wheels just can't provide the quality that we do at SWS. These days the big brands have other priorities, such as high volume production at the lowest possible costs, confronting them with certain limitations," replies Kris Seminck to the question of why to choose hand-built bicycle wheels. For serious cyclists, wheels are not just an integral part of the bike; the influence is felt in its handling, comfort and performance, making them one of the bike's most worthwhile investments.

Committed to perfection

Many companies are not able to invest the time to balance spoke tension and extensive spoke stress relief as SWS does. However, as this process is critical to the performance and long term durability of wheels, Seminck performs tension uniformity measurements on every single wheel – a process which demands a tolerance standard for spoke tension well beyond industry standard values. Seminck is convinced that this is the only way to guarantee that wheels are reliable and perform to their potential.

"SWS is committed to produce the highest quality wheels," he says passionately, "and yes, this does mean it takes me more time to build these wheels.

The ultimate choice for bike enthusiasts, SWS's well-balanced, hand-built wheels will outperform and outlast any other wheel. This is never more visible than when they finish at the top of a podium.

Performing strict quality controls which larger companies feasibly cannot undertake, enables me to produce consistent wheels every time. A well-balanced hand-built wheel will outperform and outlast any machine-built wheel. It will feel more responsive and will stay true for thousands and thousands of miles."

Expert experience

Wheel building as a handicraft has been slowly dying out, but there is a core of dedicated professionals who are doing their utmost to keep it alive. In true Belgian style, Seminck grew up surrounded by bicycles and living next to the Flemish Ardennes means that his childhood was characterised by cobblestones and the annual Belgian Classic races.

Experience in repairing wheels and problem solving across the whole spectrum of bicycle brands for years has taught Seminck valuable lessons, meaning that SWS wheels have been specifically designed to avoid these issues he has previously encountered. One substantial benefit to SWS's small-scale production is its very close technical relationship with his suppliers, each hand-selected based on the technology and quality of their components. Using only those parts that work – and will keep working for years to come – he guarantees that his wheels will be fully serviceable.

Too often, mass-produced wheels are discontinued after a few months or years, leaving the customer no choice but to buy a brand new set. It is Seminck's goal to support his clients to the maximum so if they need a repair years down the line, he will definitely be able to fix it, providing outstanding service through unparalleled durability.

As the only official DT Swiss Service Centre for wheels in Belgium and Luxembourg, Seminck has been servicing the renowned brand's wheels for years, thereby boosting his own wheel building skills even further.

Proven by performance

The ultimate choice for bike enthusiasts, SWS's wheels have been proved to perform well, and this is never more visible than when they stand at the top of a podium. The decision to support several teams and individual athletes has always been an inspired one. Currently at the top of the world standings for the 2014/2015 season, performances by the Dutch cyclocross rider Sophie de Boer and the Belgian paracyclist Diederick Schelfhout have definitely been helped by the durability and handling of their SWS wheels.

Based on Seminck's expertise and passion, anyone riding SWS custom-built wheels gets that extra-added push, enabling them to ride harder, faster and more comfortably. Akin to tailor-made suits or custom-made shoes, these wheels have enhanced properties that are designed and built solely for the client and intended to last.

www.sws-cycling.com

This year, SWS is launching a brand new 'exclusive and high-end' wheel series at Vélofollies in Kortrijk, Belgium on 16-18 January. Be there!

See page 40 for more information.

Sport is emotion

Sportune is a quirky and successful Belgian company that specialises in the development of innovative custom clothing concepts."We create sportswear which helps and supports the athlete, but also keep in mind that our customer wants to strengthen its brand," says Stefan van Ouytsel, co-founder of Sportune.

TEXT: BERTHE VAN DEN HURK | PHOTOS: SPORTUNE

Sportune can safely say that they are the absolute best in their field in the Benelux. Their customers are leading companies such as Brussels Airlines, Duvel Moortgat and the Kellogg Company. Sportune is brilliant in concept and product development and offers accompanying services for businesses. According to Van Ouytsel it is because Sportune knows and understands the athlete, as well as the companies and brands. "We do not only speak their language, we understand what it is the customer wants and needs. We work closely with top athletes to develop the best products. We know that our customer is not always directly the athlete, but sometimes a company or brand."

Sportune differentiates itself from other creative agencies by making sportswear their core business. They develop new products like clothing, but also provide great services. Van Ouytsel: "The clothes we deliver breathe the brand in detail; the product type, the properties of the product, the printing of the products, the 'woven labels', hangtags and packaging. It is not about us, but about maximising the brand and brand experience for the final user of the products."

Branded sportswear

Research and statistics show that if companies support their employees with, inter alia, sport activities or products, the employees develop a better a relationship with the company. By providing employees the tools to go out and enjoy sports, results not only in a better relationship, but also results in more productive, positive and healthy employees. For this exact reason, the leading Belgian airline Brussels Airlines promotes an active lifestyle among its employees worldwide. Sportune suggested working together with the airline to create a range of running, walking and cycling gear. Sportune handled the design, development, production and distribution of the products for the employees of Brussels Airlines.

Many people love (to do) sports, so it is not strange that sports sponsorship is the world's most active branch of advertising. Sportune responds to this with ingenuity. "We create sportswear which helps and supports the athlete, but also keep in mind that our customer wants to strengthen its brand. We reach people in their spare time while they pursue their passion," says Van Ouytsel: "Sport is emotion. That is what we respond to, to increase the customers' or employees' loyalty."

Love for a brand

An individual can almost be in love with a brand or company. "Two great examples are Herbalife and Vedett. Both brands have true fans who want to have all their products. For Herbalife we have created a collection of products for endurance athletes; we aimed at amateur runners, gym enthusiasts and athletes," says Van

Ouytsel. Sportune created a collection with custom developed products, marketed under the Herbalife brand. The range is constantly adjusted by Sportune and supplemented with new products.

Van Ouytsel: "For the Belgian premium lager Vedett, we have also created something special. Vedett is known for its innovative and fun marketing campaigns, with great attention to authenticity and individual experience of customers. Vedett puts its fans as people who enjoy being the centre of attention. To emphasise brand values, Sportune developed a unique retro shirt from merino wool, inspired by the cycling jerseys of yesteryear."

Four businesses

Sportune distinguishes itself by the drive for innovation in terms of products, but also in terms of service. Sportune has four business units: 'Custom Sportswear' (NODRUGS) which is distributed directly to clubs and corporations; 'Collections' that are for sale at events and through selected dealers; 'Private Label' productions for other companies and brands; and 'Custom branding' product development and distributing: tents, flags, printed leisure clothing, printing etc.

No drugs for teams

"Clothing and products help the athlete without the use of drugs," he says. There is a little joke in the name, but the NODRUGS collection is very serious and very successful. This mainly custom sportswear brand is distinctive because the designs are classy and a bit naughty, and in full colour. Van Ouytsel: "We have developed this brand for the people who try to go beyond their sportive capabilities, for no one other than themselves. The message in this collection is 'The hero is in you'. It is exactly what we want to provide for people who want to reach their limits and more. It is not about the big heroes, but about themselves. The NODRUGS collection has products that help people and support them to continue to become better at their sport, their passion."

www.brandwear.be
www.sportune.com

DIFFERENT AND HIGH QUALITY CYCLING WEAR?

Andrea Tafi is your brand

TEXT: CATHY VAN KLAVEREN | PHOTOS: ANDREA TAFI

Some years ago, it all started when cyclist Andrea Tafi ended his professional career to pursue a different dream: creating sportswear for people who have the same passion for cycling as he does. Last year a new company was created by businessman Guy Colman. Together they combine Italy's expertise in fashion for cycling with Belgian business quality.

Eye for detail is everything for this young brand. The designs are exclusive; the materials used are of the highest quality and the presentation of the clothes is distinctive. If you want to differentiate yourself on the bike, you need to be introduced to the Andrea Tafi cycling brand.

The wow-effect

In the representative shops of Andrea Tafi, you will find a *bottega*, a shop-in-shop concept where the whole collection including accessories is outlined. "We want to create the best shopping experience for our customers," Guy says. "We want our dealers to give the best possible service: in terms of product information, giving advice and dressing the cyclists, man or woman, from head to toe. Our customers have to experience a wow-effect from the moment they walk into a bottega, to wearing their brand new Tafi-outfit on their next bike ride. We give the customer value for money and the opportunity to complete his/her outfit with lots of accessories."

From the start of this year, you will also find a unique collection of sunglasses: each adapted to the existing clothing designs and available in different types of lenses suitable for every specific use. Also a new line of skincare products will be launched mid-2015. Furthermore, Tafi Sports is making plans to increase the collection with shoes and helmets, all branded and designed by Andrea Tafi, combining high quality products with a high sense of fashion.

Availability

The brand today is mainly active in the Benelux markets, but after a successful year Tafi Sports is looking to expand all over the world. Recently, a bike shop in Abu Dhabi was added to the dealer list and many others are expected to follow. Also for teams and companies, Tafi Sports offers custom-made cycling wear. Upon request, it will happily send out an offer for a tailor-made proposition.

Experience it yourself by visiting one the dealers in the Benelux or surf to Tafi Sports' new website with brand new webshop. The company will also be represented at Vélofollies on 16-18 January at stand number 130 (see page 40).

www.andreatafi.com

Why cyclists are turning to titanium

A trusted force in medical, marine and aerospace applications, titanium is a premium material in consumer goods. But did you know that this metal is also used in the bicycle industry? Dutch bicycle manufacturer Van Nicholas explains why we should all be riding titanium.

TEXT: ANDRÉ GUSSEKLOO | PHOTOS: VAN NICHOLAS

"Nothing compares to titanium," says Ralph Moorman, general manager of Van Nicholas. "It's stronger than aluminium, lighter than steel and it doesn't corrode. We have such a strong belief in titanium, that we exclusively use this material for our bicycle frames."

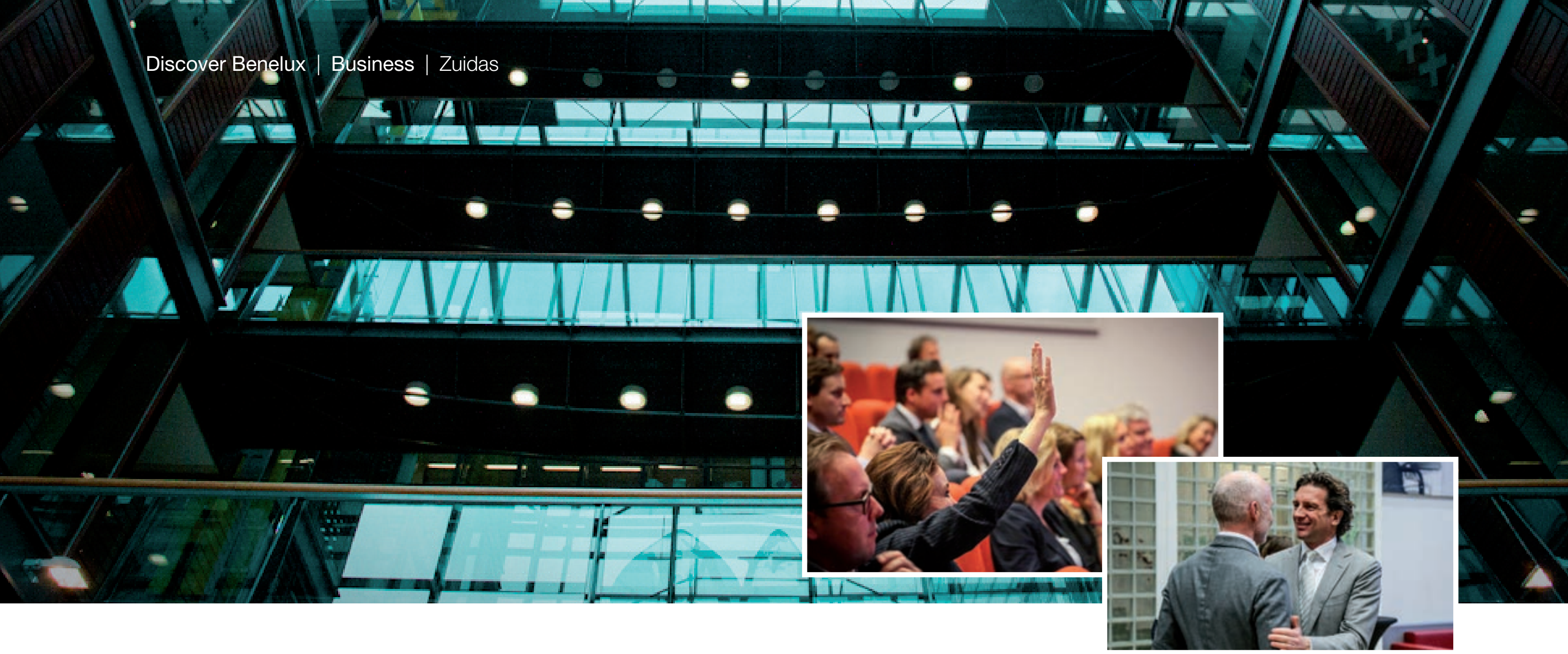
Depending on the user, bicycles put up with a great deal of abuse: weather influences, different terrains and strong forces. Few metals can endure all this as easily as titanium. It was only a matter of time before keen cyclists would discover the timeless beauty of its unparalleled properties. "Our company started manufacturing titanium bikes in 2006 and consumer response has been overwhelming," says Moorman. Clients, ranging from world-travellers to road racers, can configure their bikes to their own needs through the company's website.

The company's high-end road, mountain and touring models are each designed with a drive for perfection. Radical ideas, industry trends and feedback on existing models are combined to form a design that is simulated and tested exhaustively, after which the engineers return to their drawing tables for the next round. "Our clients expect and deserve the best possible riding experience," explains Moorman, "so that has always been our mission."

Even to the untrained eye, the end result is impressive. Since titanium does not require any weather treatment, the slightly brushed frames give the bikes a sleek and minimalistic look. However, it is when pedalling away with them that the real difference is noticed. "Van Nicholas bike owners love the durability of the frames and the smoothness of the ride. These bikes are truly a long-term investment."

The company's dedication and its stellar growth have not remained unnoticed. In 2012, Van Nicholas joined the powerful Accell Group, a global holding of bicycle brands. It allowed Van Nicholas to scale up its manufacturing process and reach a larger market. Wherever you call home, chances are you'll encounter a Van Nicholas on a country road near you.

www.vannicholas.com



AMSTERDAM'S ZUIDAS

Connecting business

In September 2016, the I-tower of the World Trade Center Amsterdam will be available for rent. This is very special because the occupation rate has been very high (97 per cent) in recent years. Therefore availability was relatively small and spread out over several towers.

TEXT & PHOTOS: WTC AMSTERDAM BUSINESS CLUB

This year, more than 15,000 square metres of office space will become available. This offers opportunities for larger (and smaller) parties who want to be accommodated at the Zuidas and/or in the World Trade Center.

For WTC Amsterdam Business Club this also creates new and interesting opportunities. The last few years we have had a stable number of approximately 560 members. With the possibility of new companies we are also able to grow. And growth for a Business Club means new business opportunities for its members.

At the heart of the Zuidas

Since the opening of the World Trade Center Amsterdam in 1985, WTC Amsterdam Business Club has been an inspiring and valuable meeting place for business contacts. The club is primarily intended to serve the directors and managers of companies within the premises of the World Trade Center Amsterdam and/or the Amsterdam Zuidas area, the business heart of the Netherlands.

All of the 330 tenants in the World Trade Center Amsterdam are represented in WTC Amsterdam Business Club. More than 95 per cent of the membership has offices in the greater metropolitan Amsterdam area. Our members are employed at companies including Kempen & Co, Michael Page, IMC Financial Markets & Asset Management, ABN Amro, Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ (Holland) N.V, Free University Amsterdam, Houthoff Buruma, Amsterdam RAI, Mövenpick and Akzo Nobel.

Godfried Schölvinck is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the club. He maintains contacts with the (prospective) members, the media and neighbourhood contacts, and organises the programmes and takes care of the marketing and communication.

Business focus

WTC Amsterdam Business Club has a diverse range of programmes with both content-rich and more informal elements. Several themes relate to the current state of affairs in the Zuidas area, such as talent development, infrastructure, electrically powered transportation, accessibility, art and the public space, and are presented on a recurring basis.

Six events per year are organised to provide opportunities to make new contacts. A variety of speakers have inspired us already. Amongst them are Dick Berlijn, Frans Timmermans, Mart Visser, Hans van Breukelen and Prince Maurits van Oranje. If you would like to learn more, we have always time for a cup of coffee to provide you with further information.

Fund your future home with the most favourable mortgage deal

The best mortgage for your home

The housing market in the Netherlands is finally improving again, especially in the Zuidas of Amsterdam. Buying a house in the booming area in Amsterdam is currently much cheaper than renting one, as more and more expats are discovering.

TEXT: JANINE STERENBORG | PHOTOS: DE KREDIETER

Buying a house is not easy. Or rather: getting the right mortgage is not easy. You don't have to find one on your own though. The small and highly educated team of the independent mortgage advisors at de Kredieter, based in the central lobby of the World Trade Center area in Amsterdam South, can help you find the best mortgage tailored to your needs. "Instead of spending a lot of money on every single piece of advice you get at separate banks and insurance companies, you can reduce the costs by letting us do the job," says de Kredieter founder and co-owner Frank Bakker, "and it saves you a lot of time too!"

De Kredieter is the ideal mortgage advisor for expats who are house hunting in Amsterdam and are looking for advice with a fair price tag. Bakker: "We're experienced in working with expats. We know which banks offer the financing they need, we speak international languages, we're very flexible and if you have any questions, you can simply drop by at the office."

"It's important to be well informed before entering the housing market, so you know exactly in what price range to shop, in order to deal with acceptable monthly charges later," says Bakker. Based on their expertise and 20 years of experience, there is no doubt de Kredieter will find you the best deal. The company works with almost every bank and insurance company in the Netherlands, which allows them to find the cheapest mortgage with the best conditions on the market.

"After our search, we'll present the most suitable mortgage and explain the up- and downsides of all aspects," says Bakker. All of de Kredieter's advisers are professionals. They are for example affiliated with the Dutch federation for financial planners (Federatie Financieel Planners). This means they are obligated to update their knowledge annually, so you can expect a clear and trustworthy planning and explanation.

What mortgage is best for you depends on many factors, all of which de Kredieter will take into account. Bakker says: "Buying cheap can get very expensive when you don't understand the possible nasty fine print for example. Don't invent the wheel yourself. After all, you're dealing with a LOT of money!"

www.kredieter.nl

One big international family

Currently the only school in Amsterdam to offer A Levels, this non-profit establishment welcomes pupils aged three to 18 from across the globe to reap the benefits of British independent education in a warm environment.

TEXT: ANNA PARKIN | PHOTOS: BRITISH SCHOOL OF AMSTERDAM

"We're one big family here, we just happen to speak 42 languages!" enthuses Jonnie Goyer, principal of the British School of Amsterdam since September 2013. Providing world class learning across four departments, from early years up to secondary school, children can settle in, whatever their background. "There's a strong sense of care and warmth," explains Goyer. "We pride ourselves on knowing the children and the parents really well."

The day school's inclusive approach extends to its admissions policy, which is intentionally non-selective. "Our pupils' academic abilities range from just below average to brilliant and we get great results," Goyer adds. Following the English national curriculum, it's the only school in the city to offer A-Levels. Although this means the school loses pupils wishing to take the International Baccalaureate, they gain many who see the benefits of a specialised approach.

"If you want to study medicine, you can take all three sciences at A-Level," enthuses Goyer, adding that A-Levels allow pupils to play to their strengths and hone talents outside the classroom. This complements the school's advocacy of an all-round education, placing emphasis on extra-curricular activities.

"An education here is focused on the individual. It's about developing the whole individual and enabling each to become the best possible version of themselves that they can be. It's about unlocking potential and opening minds," asserts Goyer. "The British School of Amsterdam does not just build strong academic foundations, we build strong people."

www.britams.nl

Jonnie Goyer, principal of British School of Amsterdam

"Our school is for everyone who wants a top-class British education in the Netherlands"

From expats to locals seeking an international education, the British School of Amsterdam provides top-class British schooling for children of all nationalities aged 3 to 18. Our curriculum leads to the respected British A-Level qualification accepted by universities worldwide.

Every day is an open day at the British School of Amsterdam. Contact: info@britams.nl, +31 (0) 20 67 97 840, or see www.britams.nl

THE BRITISH SCHOOL OF AMSTERDAM

TEACHING PEOPLE, NOT JUST TOPICS

Amber
Age 14
English/Dutch

What communicates?

TEXT & ILLUSTRATION: JOSIAH FISK

'Plain language? What's that?'

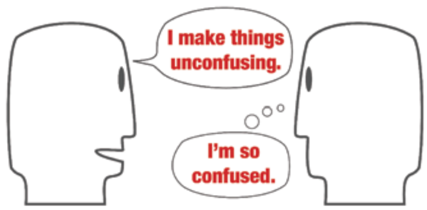
Like most of us, I have a little canned description of what I do that I can trot out during the inevitable (and usually quite enjoyable) train or airplane conversation with a seatmate.

Trouble is, I can't get my spiel to work. I've tried at least a dozen angles. No matter what I say, it doesn't communicate.

That might be okay for some professions. But when your job is giving people advice on how to communicate, the inability to communicate about that becomes a bit, well, ironic.

So I resolved that when I attended an international gathering of plain language professionals in Antwerp this past November, I would ask my colleagues for help.

They were all sympathetic. "I know," one sighed. "You say you're a plain language specialist, and there's a silence, and then you say 'I take those incomprehensible notices from companies and governments and make them more readable.' They say 'Oh', and there's another silence, and then they say, 'Hey, did



you see Arsenal – Newcastle last week?'"

While it's nice to know you're not the only person who can't communicate the fact that you communicate, I was disappointed that nobody had any suggestions.

This made no sense to me. How could it be that an entire profession whose function is to help people get their message across could fail to have found a way to get its own message across?

Yet in a funny way, with plain language, it does make sense. The whole goal of plain language is to let the reader focus completely on the content, without having to struggle with the language. In other words, the way you know a plain language expert has done a good job is when the reader has no inkling that the job was ever done (or needed to be). It's a profession that is all about not gaining attention for itself.

Josiah Fisk

But doesn't plain language need a compelling way to promote itself to the public? Probably not. The people who need to understand the value of plain language are the companies and governments with the horrible communications. And their awareness is growing rapidly.

Meanwhile, if you ever get a government notice you can understand, thank a plain language expert. Just don't ask them to explain what they do.

Josiah Fisk is the head of More Carrot LLC, a clear communications company with offices in Boston and Luxembourg.

Empower your people

TEXT: STEVE FLINDERS | PRESS PHOTO

If you already know – and can say – what the difference is between delegation and empowerment, please skip this month's article. But I chose this topic because most of the many managers I've worked with can't in fact do this, and yet it's a critical distinction for any manager to be able to make. So, if you're still reading, think about this:

- Delegating a job to someone over whom you have authority in the workplace, means telling them to carry out the work while you retain the final responsibility for the job being done.

- Empowering someone to do a job means not only telling someone to do the work but handing over the responsibility to them as well.

When you empower people, you help them to become more responsible for their work, and to develop the confidence to take on new and bigger responsibilities; you stretch them; and you encourage greater commitment, involvement and motivation in them.

How do we decide when to delegate and when to empower? If you don't know the Situational Leadership model developed by Hersey and Blanchard in the 70s and 80s, then Google it today. It tells us that good managers adapt their leadership style to fit the level of maturity of each individual or team. You delegate to newcomers as well as providing lots of support and direction. As they develop experience and confidence, you encourage their growing autonomy by empowering them more. Try plotting the position of each of your people on a graph indicating experience and confidence. Doing this makes us think more about just how we manage the people who report to us. We can ask our reports where they think they are too. We can explain the distinction between delegation and empowerment to them. We can further surface the process by discussing why and how we decide between delegation and empowerment for them.

In an international context, be ready to spend more time explaining why you want to empower or delegate a task to someone to avoid confusion with, for example, a team member from a very hierarchical work culture – one where the boss is always in charge. They may feel insecure or threatened, or may feel that you are not doing your own job properly. International communication takes longer but it's worth the effort.

Steve Flinders

Steve Flinders is a freelance trainer, consultant, writer and coach who helps people develop their communication skills for working internationally. He's also a member of the steering group of Coaching York which aspires to make York the coaching capital of the UK (www.coachingyork.co.uk): steveflind@aol.com

Entrepreneurship mushrooms in the Benelux

A local man jokes that Tropicana in Rotterdam has changed from a zwemparadijs (swimming paradise) into a zwamparadijs (mushroom paradise). The former tropical leisure pool closed its doors to the public in 2010 and in 2013 became the centre of operations for Rotterzwam, a company producing oyster mushrooms.

TEXT & PHOTOS: STUART FORSTER

"We were inspired by the book *The Blue Economy* by Gunter Pauli, a Belgian guy who tells people you can make new business models out of local stuff, waste especially, and this can make a difference and more jobs," says Mark Slegers, who, along with Siemen Cox, is one of the two co-founders and directors of Rotterzwam. The idea they are following is one of the sustainable, environmentally friendly business models espoused by Pauli, who was born in Antwerp in 1956. Now living in Tokyo, Pauli founded the Zero Emissions Research & Initiatives think tank, ZERI, which, guided by the Kyoto Protocol, aims to reduce carbon emissions.

From coffee to oyster mushrooms

"If you drink coffee, 99.8 per cent of the bean is thrown away. Only 0.2 per cent is in the cup. In the Netherlands we are one of the biggest coffee drinkers in the world. About 120 million kilograms of coffee is imported every year," says Slegers, giving background information about Rotterzwam's source of energy for growing mushrooms.

"We collect coffee waste from cafes in central Rotterdam. We bring it here on a cargo bike and make a substrate out of it, mix it, and put oyster mushroom seeds in. Then it will become a mushroom in five to six weeks and we sell the mushrooms back to restaurants in the city," explains the entrepreneur in the tiled basement of Tropicana.

A base for local entrepreneurs

The site of Rotterzwam's operations is a well-known riverside landmark. Tropicana was opened by Center Parcs in 1988, hosting a heated wave pool, waterslides, a

sauna, beauty and wellness treatment areas plus a dance club. Unlike other properties owned by Center Parcs, Tropicana did not have accommodation and was sold in the early 1990s. People continued to use the pool and its slides until 2010, when the attraction was closed.

In 2013 the go-ahead was given for Tropicana to be used by local entrepreneurs. The terrace was re-opened as a café-bar, making use of loungers and seating left behind and recycled from the building's previous incarnation. The concept has subsequently been developed further and Aloha now also incorporates a restaurant and a landscaped, sub-tropical park featuring indoor plants.

The premises are also the head office of Kromkommer ('crooked cucumber'), a company promoting the use of misshapen fruit and vegetables; products that are usually rejected by shops because they do not meet the exacting aesthetic expectations which modern society places on food products. Kromkommer found that produce such as double-legged and twisted carrots was being discarded as waste, despite being perfectly edible. The company produces soups and organises initiatives to distribute and sell misshapen farm produce.

Recycling waste for profit

In order to create the ideal base for growing mushrooms, Rotterzwam mixes waste from coffee beans, discarded during roasting, with the used grinds. "The mushrooms break down the chemicals in the coffee, so you don't get the taste; they taste of normal oyster mushrooms," says Slegers.

There's also a practical reason why Rotterzwam keeps their operation local and collects grinds frequently. "If you have coffee grinds older than five days you have other fungus in it and you have to sterilise it, so that introduces energy costs," says the company director.

Tropicana's erstwhile changing rooms house the various phases of Rotterzwam's operations, from the preparation of the substrate to mushrooms that are about to be harvested. Slegers shows off discarded clothes hangers, which he found on the site, from which plastic bags hang riddled with white fungal growth. Oyster mushrooms protrude from holes. Around 7,500 kilos are harvested annually.

Each bag is good for two or three mushroom harvests then becomes part of the 4,000 to 5,000 tonnes of compost produced by Rotterzwam each year. The company sells its compost back to the city, helping plants around the municipality to grow. This isn't Rotterzwam's only by-product. "Mushrooms break down the coffee grinds with enzymes. We extract them and sell these enzymes back to the water and sewerage companies who have waste. You can make biofuel from that waste. The yield of the biofuel will rise 20 per cent with enzymes, so they become more profitable," says Slegers. The entrepreneur believes that exchanging ideas in an open source manner is an effective means of spreading the popularity of the blue economy concept and changing how people think while benefitting the environment. "Nature makes no waste. If you look at nature and learn how it works you can make a profit," he says.

Benelux business calendar

TEXT: STINE WANNEBO | PHOTOS: ETHNIC FOODS EUROPE

A new year brings with it new opportunities. Why not start 2015 by learning a new skill, discovering a new interest or broadening your knowledge?

Below we have listed some exciting events that can make this year more interesting and productive than ever.

Ethnic Foods Europe

Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 12 – 15 January

Over 60 brands from 20 different countries will fill the Amsterdam RAI with the smells, colours and flavours of faraway foods. Manufacturers, suppliers, businessmen and culinary enthusiasts will try to make a lasting impression on the visitors' taste buds. Falling on the same weekend as Horecava – the largest food service fair in the country – the second weekend of January is a great time for foodies.

www.ethnicfoodseurope.com

Presentation Skills Training

Brussels, Belgium, 15 January

This one-day course aims to help participants improve their public speaking skills and is set in the grand Science Auditorium. By recording the presentation a trainer will give feedback on vocal and non-verbal techniques, visual aids and delivery of the message. The course will also focus on how to respond to audience questions and manage nerves.

www.communicatingeu.com

Agriflanders

Ghent, Belgium, 15 – 18 January

Every other year the Flemish agricultural fair is allowed to bloom, attracting 80,000 visitors and over 320 exhibitors. The event focuses on the cattle industry in the broadest sense of the term, and visitors can purchase everything from farm animals to educational books. Learn more about the industry, services available and the newest technological innovations or take part in competitions and the famous animal shows.

www.agriflanders.be

Global Forum on Subsea Exploration and Production Technology

Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 19 – 20 January

Representatives from all the big names across the vast industry of the subsea sector – Shell, BP, Aker Solutions, the Scottish Government and many more – will speak at this second annual forum. They will explore the challenges related to the decline of natural oil and gas and will discuss subsea strategies to examine and resolve this issue.

www.prosperoevents.com

Legal Risks and New Technology Conference

Brussels, Belgium, 22 – 23 January

This conference by the IBA Technology Law Committee supported by the European Regional Forum will focus on a range of issues relating to new technologies, including integration, security and governance. The talks are aimed at professionals in the financial services and technology sectors as well as those interested in the latest developments in technology law.

www.ibanet.org

Conference on Extraction and Knowledge Management

Luxembourg City, Luxembourg, 27-30 January

The Centre de Recherche Public-Gabriel Lippmann is a public institution devoted to applied scientific research and technological development. It will host this annual conference discussing the current state of EGC (Extraction et Gestion des Connaissances) in the French-speaking world as professionals from data mining, statistics and information visualisation will look at current business trends. Researchers, students and industrialists from a large variety of fields will be attending.

www.crpgl.lu

The perfect fit

Timeless, elegant and versatile, that is the jumpsuit by Dutch fashion designer Astrid Elisee. Made from high quality silk, it has a sophisticated cut that suits any body type and is available in a dozen stylish colours. Popular with actresses, politicians and celebrities, it's no wonder shops call her up daily because they're running out of stock.

TEXT: MYRIAM GWYNNED DIJCK | PHOTOS: ASTRID ELISEE

"The jumpsuit is a classy basic every woman should have, just like the little black dress and the trench coat," company founder Astrid Elisee says. "Our jumpsuit is very adaptable, it can be worn to work, out and about and on a night out. Many of our clients own it in several colours."

Just three years ago Elisee started her own fashion label with a collection of silk items. When she saw the enthusiasm and continuous positive reactions from customers wearing her jumpsuit – who she noticed felt instantly more confident – she decided to make it her main and only business. "The cut of the jumpsuit is just spot-on, it fits anyone. It is timeless, classy, smart and just a perfect basic," she says.

The fact that the jumpsuit is suitable for anyone and any occasion is exemplified by Elisee's clients. Her target group is women from 20 to 70 years old. She comments, "My mother, who is 70, actually has three of our jumpsuits in different colours. Then another customer got married in our jumpsuit!"

For Elisee the choice to go for silk was an easy one. She has always had a love for silk garments because of its exquisite and versatile qualities. "Silk looks luxurious, it flows beautifully and falls perfectly around the body and washed silk has a cool-casual look for daily use. Plus, you don't throw away a silk clothing item, so that fits with our sustainability policy."

At the moment Elisee's jumpsuits are available in numerous high-end boutiques across the Netherlands and Belgium with London and Paris as the next step. She is also planning to venture into Scandinavia and Italy in the near future, as well as expand the collection with more timeless basics. She adds: "We want to keep a sense of exclusivity in our brand and we are very selective when we choose new outlets for our label. Sometime this year we would also like to introduce new items like the boyfriend shirt." The jumpsuits with long or short sleeves, made from washed heavy silk – now available in five new winter colours – can be bought directly from the website.

astridelisee.com

Timeless and honest designs

Leather products that are artisanal, timeless and made with love and attention. Everything is produced as sustainably as possible, and with a sharp eye for quality. Atelier PHILOMIJN designs it all: bags, wallets, belts, tablet covers and cushions. "The design must be original but timeless, so it is still fashionable in ten years," says Philomijn Eijssen, founder of PHILOMIJN.

TEXT: BERTHE VAN DEN HURK | PHOTOS: PHILOMIJN

PHILOMIJN is a company that creates luxurious leather (unisex) bags and interior accessories, but it all started with the creation of a scarf. Philomijn: "I still was a student, I had no money at all, and had nothing else than a piece of wool. I created a scarf which I wore myself. The stores I went to, to sell my products, wanted to buy the scarf immediately. From that point on I started PHILOMIJN. Later on, I created a leather version of that scarf."

Honest and sustainable designs

According to Philomijn, simplicity and functionality should go hand in hand. "We like fashion but we are not in fashion," she says. This means that PHILOMIJN does not participate in the trends and seasons of the fashion world. This enables her to supply the products all year round, which is different from other fashion companies. "The designs are timeless and honest. All our products are produced as authentically and sustainably as possible. Everything is manufactured in-house. We can switch and deliver quickly because we have a great network of craftsmen."

The collection is sold in high-end fashion boutiques and interior stores in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Hong Kong. Philomijn: "Our goal is to grow in Europe. Our bags love traveling, so we also want to go overseas."

Luxurious leather

PHILOMIJN only uses the best leather from Italy. All the leather is as sustainably produced as possible; they even have leather which is 100% ecological. Philomijn: "We want to create honest products. Most of our craftsmen are locals or located in the Netherlands." Leather becomes more beautiful over time and when used. "At fairs, we often bring along used bags, so people can see how beautifully the leather ages."

www.philomijn.com

Crossing the borders of styles

Creating a beautiful piece of jewellery that matches any outfit, but is still a unique and eye-catching piece of art. That is one of the ways to describe the art of The Hague based jewellery artist Petra Reijrink. There is a lot more to her though!

TEXT: JANINE STERENBORG | PHOTOS: PETRA REIJRINK

"People tend to connect jewellery to a certain emotion," Reijrink explains. "Sometimes life hands you memories you want to keep, which makes you long for symbolism, beauty and sentiment. For example, when starting a new chapter in your life." Reijrink's handmade jewellery matches all these criteria, are all one-of-a-kind and suitable for any outfit. Reijrink: "I do not conform to any design hype. I make the jewels that I like." Yet her timeless necklaces, bracelets, brooches and more have made it into a wide range of fashion magazines. "When you look at my jewels, they fit many styles, for example punk, romantic and minimalistic. I think there are too many stigmatised styles. People should quit sticking to one style and not be afraid to mix and match."

Reijrink creates all the jewellery by hand in her studio in The Hague: "I don't have a standard collection available. I like to keep creating new things. As a result, no two items are the same and at every store that sells my jewellery, you'll find different items selected especially in the style of each store."

The new 'Exclusive Line' is an exception to this. "These are the only jewels I don't create by hand. I design them, a befriended Tokyo-based silversmith makes them." All items are made from 18 carat gold on sterling silver, precious stones, fresh water pearls and enamel and the design is inspired by fine French antique jewels and the journeys Reijrink has made. "Everywhere, nature was a big inspiration. The colourful mix of lush flowering plants, bright coloured berries and nature in motion have inspired this collection."

It is hard to imagine that Reijrink has not been a jewellery artist all her life. Until four years ago she worked for a big corporation when she started to sell items to her colleagues. Shops became interested and before she knew it she was an entrepreneur. "It got out of hand!" she laughs. "And in the beginning I was still developing my own style. By now, I have one: fine details, originality and wearability are what characterise my jewels."

www.petrareijrink.com

Out & About

Now that the dark winter days are behind us, there seems to be a rhapsody of refreshing colour appearing in the midst of the cold and grey weather outside. Astonishing theatre acts, luscious sweets, vigorous events, chocolate fairs, 2015 is starting with a promising and vibrant list of events.

TEXT: STINE WANNEBO | PHOTOS: HOLLAND.COM, PETER STIGTER

A splash of colour on the grey city

Luxembourg City, Luxembourg, 2 – 3 January

For two consecutive nights the world-famous Cirque Éloize will perform their stunning show *Cirkopolis.* Set in a grey and tired factory landscape, the actors, dancers and acrobats will be rebelling against the monotony and spreading colour and fantasy. The show combines theatre, dance and circus in a poetic impulse of life, leaving audiences both inspired and moved. The gripping performances received the 2014 Drama Desk Award and the artistic director is the celebrated Jeannot Painchaud.

www.cirque-eloize.com

Love is in the air

Luxembourg City, Luxembourg, 10 January

A whole new kind of wedding fair is set to take place in Luxembourg this month – one that is trendy, edgy and vibrant. The Love Bash concept was created by three ladies eager to give brides and grooms across Europe a pop, rock or quirky alternative wedding. Imagination and innovation will flow through Luxembourg's Neumünster Abbey when photographers, florists, musicians, event planners and caterers all gather to explore the possibilities of a non-traditional wedding day.

www.thelovebash.com

A chocolate palette

Brussels, Belgium, 10 – 13 January

Imagine chocolate and confectionary as far as the eye can see, when the established christening fair appears under the new name of Fedoba. There will be sugar-covered almonds, sweets in all shapes and sizes, home décor, bath salt and everything in-between. For professionals this will be an excellent opportunity to meet others with the same interest and have a look at the latest fashions. Visitors are likely to leave the fair with a big cotton candy cloud of ideas and perhaps slightly high on sugar.

www.fedoba.com

Cycling in circles

Kortrijk, Belgium, 16 – 18 January

Bicycle mania will be hitting Belgian city of Kortrijk when the Vélofollies Expo enters Flanders this month. It is the sixth year in a row that the event has been hosted here and every year it attracts cyclists and sport fans from all over Europe. Velofollies is the largest and most diverse bicycle show in the Benelux region and covers the entire world of cycling – from BMX and mountain bikes to racing and city bikes. In addition to an abundance of fun activities there will also be opportunities to purchase acces-

Cirque Éloize

sories, bike tips and trips. Read more about cycling and our featured exhibitors on Vélofollies on pages 40 to 53.
www.velofollies.be

Fashion by the Netherlands

Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 16 – 26 January
The Dutch fashion week always devotes a lot of attention to the up and coming designers and this year will be no exception. The Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Amsterdam has a wide range of catwalks, shows and concerts running over a number of days making visitors able to pick and choose when it comes to what they want to see. Expect a spectacular event that will be nothing short of stunning.
www.fashionweek.nl

The annual tulip explosion

Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 17 January
National Tulip Day, on 17 January, marks the official beginning of the tulip season in Holland. Every year Amsterdam's Dam Square is transformed into a garden of tens of thousands of tulips (which is only a minuscule part of the 1.7 billion Dutch tulips that are sold every year). Attendance is free and visitors can even pick some free tulips – just make sure you arrive early. Every Dutch tulip grower takes part in the festivities, organising surprises and promotions. In addition there will be marvellous gardens displaying Holland's trademark flower like no one else could.
www.holland.com

Antiques á la mode

Luxembourg City, Luxembourg, 30 January – 2 February
Find your way through the ages, styles and materials in the hunt for the perfect piece of art or antique to fit your taste. At The LuxExpo Art & Antiques Fair antiques are displayed along contemporary art as over a hundred exhibitors from over ten countries convene this month. Art and antique lovers get the chance to meet professionals who have an ocean of knowledge in their special fields. From old books and jewellery to prints and furniture, there will be a treasure for everyone hidden somewhere among all the voguish artefacts.
www.antiquaires.lu

Cirque Éloize

STATES OF ART

Deciphering reality and the virtual world

TEXT: MATT ANTONIAK | PHOTOS: TONY OURSLER

Video art is perhaps the most alienating of all arts. Maybe that is because when it is done badly it can look little more than a school kid playing around with his new camera like a toy. However, when done with a little more thought, video art can tap into and tackle things that other art forms cannot. Tony Oursler is a vanguard of contemporary video, and in this site-specific exhibition, *I/O Underflow* at the Oude Kerk he has used video to tackle the complex and increasingly important issue of how we differentiate between our virtual world and reality.

As the Internet takes an ever-firmer grasp over our lives, we spend more hours every day staring at a screen. We consume endless photos, digital imagery and visuals in the digital sphere and then have to be able to instantly switch back to the real world.

The Oude Kerk provides the perfect setting to visualise this idea. Oursler's videos are projected onto the architecture, carvings and stained glass of the old church creating a beautiful juxtaposition between the two. The outcome is to put the viewer through a metaphorical Turing test; having to constantly decipher and flick between what is real and what is machine.

This is the first time Oursler has exhibited in the Netherlands in over 15 years, and alongside this commission, Oursler also projects his works onto the façade of the Stedelijk Museum, as well as onto the outside of the Oude Kerk itself, as part of the Amsterdam Light Festival which runs until 18 January.

I/O Underflow by Tony Oursler at the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam is on until 29 March.

The solution to New Year's resolutions

TEXT & PHOTO: ANOUK KALMES

I don't know anyone who hasn't ever made resolutions for the New Year; the most common ones are related to going on a diet, starting a gym routine and quitting smoking. The inspiration for making positive changes to our lives usually arises in the last quarter of the year. That's when we start saying, "on 1 January, I will start a diet and I am determined to lose x number of kilos." With this target date in mind, we spend the remaining days of the old year indulging in our perceived vices. When 1 January arrives, our determination to resist the piece of chocolate is at its strongest. We have now switched to e-cigarettes or we have even gone cold turkey. And we can't wait for 2 January when the gym opens and we can submit our membership application.

I would guess that we manage to maintain this new virtuous life for a couple of weeks up to a month. But before we know it, our old habits have taken over again and we give in to food temptations, we have started skipping gym workouts and we are back to chain smoking. We explain our failure to maintain our resolutions by telling ourselves and others that we have no time and there is too much stress in our lives. And when we approach the end of the year, we go back into resolutions mode and make great plans for the next New Year that again we won't follow through.

My solution to this is simply not to make any New Year's resolutions. When you are serious about making changes in your life, you should not wait until 1 January to execute them. There is only ever one best time to take action: it's now; neither in the past, nor in the future. If you can give it up now, in this very moment, the chances are that it will be a lasting change and that you have succeeded in breaking the cycle.

Read more about Anouk's life and travels on her lifestyle blog www.luxessed.com

Where to live when living in Amsterdam

TEXT: SIMON WOOLCOT | PHOTO: SILVIA DE VRIES

A common request received by the Shallow Man is for advice on where to live in Amsterdam. An area that offers a lot of contrasts and is pretty trendy right now is Amsterdam West. To do it justice, I will split it into two main neighbourhoods: Oud West and Bos en Lommer.

According to the Roman Catholic Church, Purgatory is the place between Heaven and Hell, from where those who have not committed mortal sin go to heaven. The same could be said of Oud West. It is situated tantalisingly close to the Heaven of Amsterdam South and also within smartphone-snatching, easy scooter-riding distance to the Hell that is Bos en Lommer.

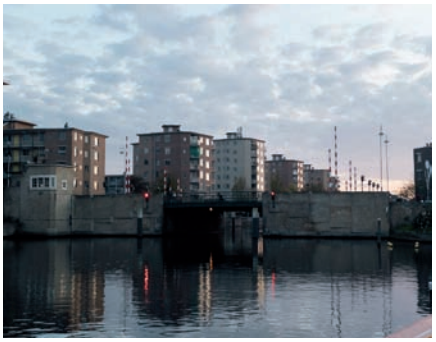
If you want to see up and coming yuppies in their natural habitat, move to Oud West. This neighbourhood is hip, consisting of delicatessens, good wine dealers, and plenty of lively cafes. Back in the day, the Shallow Man could frequently be seen at Cafe Oslo, fighting off cheap-boot-wearing ladies with bad haircuts. Think of Manhattan's East Village and you'll be in the right ballpark.

In recent years, lots of renovations have taken place here, making it an incredibly good value place to buy or rent property. When going for breakfast or lunch during the weekend, please be careful not to trip, due to selfish parents parking their bugaboo pushchairs anywhere they please. That aside, Amsterdam Oud West gets the Shallow Man's seal of approval, something I'm sure will bring joy to the local council.

If Dante were alive today, he'd have based his masterwork, *Inferno,* in Bos en Lommer. For those of you not familiar with Dante, he wrote about taking a tour through hell. I'm sure that there's a Dante straat in Bos en Lommer somewhere. Like Amsterdam East, Bos en Lommer is at the very end of known civilisation. It's a long and perilous journey to get there, and upon arriving you'll soon realise that apart from the joys of doner, some gambling halls and a few local social clubs, there is very little to do there.

If you are looking for a neighbourhood which even Taxi drivers are afraid to take passengers to (even though many of them live there) and want to be guaranteed a life of boredom and eternal torment, move to Bos en Lommer.

www.amsterdamshallowman.com



Thoughts on evenings

TEXT & PHOTO: SILVIA DE VRIES

At the time of writing it's the end of one of those typical, grey Dutch days. While it hasn't been really light out all day, the sky turns even darker when night falls, and across the canal I can see people switch on the lights in their homes. It reminds me of a similar moment, a couple of days ago. I took a bus from Amsterdam to Haarlem; I didn't need a book or mobile to keep me occupied.

While driving through different neighbourhoods into the seemingly forgotten stretch of land between Amsterdam and Haarlem, what you witness is the daily evening rituals of many a household. See, the Dutch tend to leave the curtains open, allowing passers-by a glimpse into their homes.

What unfolds while driving past home after home with rooms lit against the dark backdrop of the evening sky is a slideshow of interior design, people and rituals. Black walls, red walls, white walls. Wallpapered walls; flower print, stripes or dots. People enjoying dinner alone or with their family or no dinner at all, just homework at the table… Homes with an empty table, a table full of titbits, a table full of food. Nothing is as diverse as the human being and therefore also the place they call home.

I love this time of night, when everything is covered in a blanket of darkness, which to me makes the world a little gentler: the sound of daily life slowly fades away, people going home, stopping working. It seems so normal, yet when you look at the process closer or through the window of a bus, you see that even the most mundane things have a silver lining.

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